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SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. V.

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"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. V.

FOR THE YEAR 1871.

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BY

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PREFACE TO VOL. V.

I HAVE little to add to this Volume by way of Preface, except to record my thanks to the Editor of the *Index*, Toledo, Ohio, for having already published in that paper nearly all that this Volume contains; to the Editor of the *Eastern Post*, London, for having given very copious and accurate reports of all my sermons since I began to preach in St. George's Hall; and to the Editor of the *Cosmopolitan* of London, Paris, and New York, for reprinting those reports. Such expressions of interest, if not of sympathy, are very valuable, and are calculated to awaken thought and discussion upon the important topics here treated of.

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LECTURE ON RATIONALISM.

THE term "Rationalism" on which I have somewhat presumptuously undertaken to address you this evening might possibly mislead some of my hearers to expect from me a dissertation following in the steps—but at a very humble distance—of the well-known writers on the subject. My purpose is very different. Among many epithets such as "blasphemer," "infidel," and the like, which have been liberally applied to me by the orthodox Churches and sects, the name of "Rationalist" has been given to me by those who have only spoken of me with respect. The views which I have for so many years taught from the pulpits of the Church of England, and which to a greater or less degree are embraced and promulgated by many of the Anglican Clergy, are commonly spoken of under the vague and general term, Rationalism. I have observed, too, that in every intelligent part of the United Kingdom, similar views prevail, and that they are designated by the same title. The use of the term Rationalism in this country, however, must not be confounded with its

application to a class of thinkers in Germany who go by the name of Rationalists, and whose standpoint is altogether different from ours. Over the whole civilised world, within the last twenty years, there has been a tone of thought on religious matters spreading itself, which is absolutely incompatible with adherence to the popular Creeds. It has, in fact, become a matter of world-wide interest to enquire what this Rationalism is; how it differs from the acceptance of so-called Revelation; and what are the general results of Rationalism in forming a new religious belief.

There are two courses open to me in dealing with these questions. I might either collect the varied testimony furnished by the writings of the Rationalists of this part of the nineteenth century and from them deduce the general distinctive principles of Rationalism; or I might take the workings of my own mind and unfold the mechanism of Rationalism in active operation. The former of these courses is beset with difficulty for me, and it would require too much time to pursue it exhaustively. The latter course is more within my reach, and may prove even more interesting than an analysis of those writings which most readers can study for themselves.

Another reason for explaining my own Rationalism, is the necessity under which I have been laid by being forced into the position of a representative man. I would willingly escape from such a perilous prominence if I could; but I am reminded on all sides that thousands are looking to me as their

spokesman, and that it is essential to the integrity of the cause for which I have suffered that I should lose no time in fully declaring my opinions, and —what is of much more importance—in frankly stating my principles.

If I am to be called a Rationalist, my new godfathers and godmothers must be thoroughly informed what it is they have so designated. If any share in the great work of the Reformation of Christianity is to fall to my lot, it must be distinctly declared beforehand what I cherish as my own belief, and what I desire to substitute for that which I have laboured to destroy. I owe it not only to my many friends, but to my opponents on both sides to come out in my true colours, not to mislead any of them as to my aims or my sympathies.

It is my desire—no one can tell how fervent—to be a true brother and friend to all sorts and conditions of men—to have courage to set an example of this brotherliness and friendliness in an age when social rules are beginning to exercise that tyranny over individuals which the Churches are losing. With all my heart I long to be able, without fear of misconstruction, and without danger to the cause to which I have devoted my life, to shake hands in unvarnished friendliness with the outcasts, the disaffected, the irreligious, and the atheists. But if this genuine humanity of action is ever to be achieved, it can only be after a clear and definite understanding that we repudiate the conduct, or the opinions, or the political principles of those whom

we believe to be in the wrong, but whom we, nevertheless, treat with manly respect.

If, therefore, you feel any sympathy with the cause of religious freedom, and any interest in the spread of a pure Theism, both of which are so dear to myself, I shall not be trespassing on your time and patience if I detain you a few minutes to repudiate, in the name of Rationalism, one or two of those characteristics which are so often erroneously considered to belong to it.

(1.) It is no essential part of Rationalism to be disloyal to the Queen and constitution of this realm. No one can hate fawning upon Royalty more than I do. But I do not disguise nor wish to qualify my personal attachment to our Sovereign, nor can I forget the enormous debt which her subjects owe to her many public and private virtues; and I can say this now without suspicion of insincerity since the law has placed me beyond the reach of her patronage.

In reference to the laws and constitution of the country, it seems to be the duty of every wise man, according to his opportunities to do his utmost to amend the laws when required, and to make their application still more impartial than it is already; but pending all such changes, to abide rigidly by the law, and to bend to its decisions so long as the law remains unrepealed. The spectacle of Bishops corresponding with each other on the question—"How far ought we to obey the law laid down in the Purchas judgment?"—and of 5,000 clergy protesting against the judgment, is to me not merely

offensive and un-English, but ominous of the coming downfall of the Church. If the hierarchs are going to play Thomas à-Becket's little game, and to deal with the decisions of our law courts as he did with the King, they will soon find that all true men will join to rob them of their mitres, and hustle them out of their seats among the Peers of the Realm.

I do not profess to be more of a politician than what every man ought to be who wishes to be an intelligent and useful citizen. Neither do I blame any one for holding republican views. But I am no republican myself, and as a Rationalist, I think it only fair to say so, especially as I have been only last week warned by an orthodox friend that Rationalism was the parent of all the crimes which have lately been witnessed in Paris.

A far more important matter is that Rationalism is often identified with Irreligion, or anti-Religion. Many will sympathise with my efforts to pull down the obstructive errors of Christianity, and to break its idols, but will sympathise with nothing else. It is only fair at the outset to say that I feel quite as religious—(and in the best sense I hope a great deal more religious)—as when I was a firm believer in Calvinism. And by the term "religious," I do not at all mean the state of one whose religion consists only in saying prayers, and in acts of worship, or in excitement of so-called religious feelings, but I call that man religious who really believes in God as the Ruler of the Universe in general, and the framer of human destiny in particular; who not only accepts this as

an intellectual idea, but whose inner and outer life are both more or less affected by that conviction, whose heart is fortified under tribulation by trust in the good purposes of God, whose whole soul adores the ineffable goodness and love, and whose feet are stedfastly set in the path of duty out of a pure unselfish desire to conform his will to that of the Supreme.

Such a definition of a religious man may be open to objection on many sides, may satisfy but few; but I give it because I must repudiate in the name of Rationalism that which is anti-religious. Prayer and praise and acts of so-called worship—whatever may be said for them—however justly they may be prized as privileges and means of moral and spiritual culture—must not be confounded with or put in the place of that which is really and only essential to true religion. While men and women are what they are—before that new era has arrived which is expected to develop quite another and a higher form of the expression of religious feeling than what we now have—we shall meet together to speak words of prayer and praise, and to assist, as it were, by mechanical means to lift the thoughts of worldly men into faith and adoration. But public worship has never yet in my opinion been developed to its full capability. We have to add largely to its thanksgiving—to eliminate all vain repetitions and whining ejaculations for mercy—to alter our intercessory prayers very considerably into prayers that we may do *our duty* to our fellow-creatures, instead of reminding God to

do His. We want more gladness and less gloom—more manly confidence and less childish awe, more of the spirit of self-culture in our prayers, than regard to the gifts God has in store.

Rationalism, such as I claim for myself, does not require me to go back into the frigid winter of eighteenth-century Deism, nor to shut my mouth when I would fain "praise Him from whom all blessings flow;" nor to hold in a bursting bosom the griefs and cares which I am ready enough to pour out before the sympathy of my best and truest friend. It tells me that my relationships are incomplete without a true Father and Friend in Heaven, that my very home would become a desert if His presence did not light it up by night and by day. It tells me that I am not wrong in obeying my instinct in placing Him first among my friends, and nearest and dearest among my relations; and that while I am in the flesh, having no other means of expressing the deepest feelings of my love, gratitude, and adoration, I am justified in using words of prayer and praise, either in public or private, to express those feelings, which, of course, He knows through and through before they can be uttered. If it be irrational to do this, then I give up the name of Rationalist as readily as I have adopted it. These are my feelings and my convictions. In this sense I am religious, and for ever wish to be, until I pass into a higher region and give up religion itself only for what is better still to come.

Having endeavoured to show what I believe

Rationalism is *not*, as regards disloyalty and anti-religion, I pass at once to the enquiry what I believe Rationalism in religion to be. Is it a new set of dogmas and opinions, or is it a new mode of thought? It is not a set of dogmas or opinions, but it is a new method of religious thought.

If there is one thing more than another that I have tried to teach to my hearers and readers, it is that I do not undertake to make their creed for them —only to let them clearly know what is my own. Again and again I have warned them all—"Do not take this or that on my authority; think it out for yourselves. Second-hand beliefs are of no more use to you than food would be if some one else ate it on your behalf." All the mischief done by religious systems is due more to the mode in which they are forced on the acceptance of mankind than to their inherent falseness or absurdity.

If you want me to make a new religion for you, it is exactly what I will not do. All I will undertake is to supply you with arguments against what you have been trained to believe, and to tell you frankly what I believe in its place, and why I believe it.

It is just because the attainment of truth, and truth alone, is the object of Rationalism, that it absolutely refuses to lay down dogmas on religious matters. Many have been the epochs of Reformation, and many more the Reformers; but hitherto all the great changes have been in the subject-matter of dogma itself, and not in the mode of enquiry after religious truth. Men have only taken up a new

authority in matters of faith, instead of the old ones with which they were dissatisfied. Fresh dogmas have been erected on the ruins of the obsolete. To lay down as an ultimate truth never to be called in question even so simple and sublime a doctrine as that of the universal Fatherhood of God, would be to outrage Rationalism, which is a standing protest against the petrifaction of a single belief into a rigid formula. Whatever we really believe to-day, we gladly and earnestly proclaim; but we hold it not with hands of stone or iron, but with the living grasp of warm affection, ready only to relax itself at the right moment, and give up our treasure when we find a better one. So we always keep before us an open avenue by which we can draw ever nearer and nearer to God and to truth. Not one single conviction, however precious, however beautiful, will be suffered to become a clog upon our feet, or a barrier to our perpetual march onwards and upwards for ever.

It is true indeed that Rationalists have very strong convictions, and positive beliefs; that they are also very nearly of one accord even in these early days of the exercise of Rationalistic methods. There is a Freemasonry of religious thought spread all over the world, and it is amazing to us who have grown up amongst the bitter dissensions of Christendom, to find a basis of union ready made to our hands, in the mere exercise of religious freedom. It is a libel and a slander upon us, as Rationalists, to say we only agree in denying everything, and in

believing nothing. Before long, orthodoxy will find arrayed against it, a vast army, well organised, and thoroughly equipped, as well as brave and powerful, and no longer open to the taunt that we are divided amongst ourselves and do not know what we believe. But nothing will satisfy orthodoxy at present. If we speak modestly about our own ignorance, and even follow the apostle in saying, "Now we see through a glass darkly, now we know only in part," the orthodox reproach us with sowing the seeds of doubt and uncertainty among trustful hearts. If, on the other hand, we boldly proclaim our earnest convictions, they turn round upon us and say, "How dogmatic you are—you are just as dogmatic as the Churches whose dogmatism you affect to condemn!" At all events, we Rationalists have some sure beliefs, and positive convictions; and before long Christendom will have to face them and flee. But these convictions are not Rationalism itself, they are its fruits. Rationalism is not a set of opinions, but a method of thought. All its action may be summed up in these words, "We take nothing on trust from the lips of our fellowmen in matters pertaining to God." We have passed out of our childhood in which we very properly received, without question, what our parents and teachers set before us, and now that we have become men, we put away childish things; we shall now think for ourselves, and adopt or reject what is presented for our belief, according to natural laws which regulate the action of the human mind. If anything appears to us to be reasonable, we will

accept it; we cannot help doing so. If it appear to us unreasonable, we shall reject it; we cannot help doing so likewise.

Now this setting up of a verifying faculty within each man's own mind—this exchange of authority for private judgment—is really one of the distinctive characteristics of our own times. There have been indeed honoured exceptions here and there, in times past, but the mass of men until now have never dreamed of questioning the principle of authority in religious matters in some shape or other. No religious sect or denomination that I am aware of, has ever been set up on the foundation of Rationalism; while those few individuals who advocated a pure Rationalism, were uniformly execrated and excommunicated by all the Churches whenever they appeared.

It is not to be overlooked that Rationalism is in itself a development out of former partial protests against certain particular authorities; but it is, I think, a mistake to attribute Rationalistic principles, for instance, to the great reformers of the sixteenth century. We owe it to them that the great despotism of the Western Church was broken, but it was only because they discovered in the *Bible* what they thought to be a higher authority than that of the *Church*. They took us out of captivity of one sort only to plunge us into another. They struck off the fetters of Romish priestcraft, and riveted some lighter ones in their place. For the tyranny of a Church they substituted the tyranny of a book. In

some cases, as in England and in Scotland, they added to the old burden of religious slavery catechisms and confessions, more oppressive to the mind and soul of man than all the weight of the older orthodoxy.

We therefore are grateful to the Reformers only for having broken the spell of an imperial sway, and for having taught us to be rebellious and to be heroic. We cannot thank them for Rationalism; this is our own; they would have burned us for it, as Calvin burned Servetus.

Now, what is the attitude of Rationalism towards the Bible? This entirely depends on the claims made for it when it is put into our hands. If it be suffered to speak for itself, the Bible is listened to by the Rationalist with mingled feelings of reverence and delight. The Bible is the oldest religious book which belongs to our country and people. It is very curious and interesting. Its quaint narratives, its mingled history and fable, its half-grotesque half-grand attempts at cosmogony and other science, its rich poetry and its fine humanity, attract our attention and win our respect. Turning to its pages for purposes of devotion we find ascriptions of praise to our Maker, in the Hebrew prophets and psalmists, which have never been equalled—tokens of a religious trust in God such as is now seldom felt. Looking to it for examples of life and manners, and making allowances for the lapse of time and the difference between eastern and western customs, we find some of the most charm-

ing exhibitions of human feeling and nobility of character. Searching in it for maxims of morality, we find the best that have ever been written, and principles of brotherly love enforced and commended in the most attractive language. To us the Bible is a collection of ancient writings, containing some of the most beautiful expositions of religious truth and of human conduct which we can find in all literature; and for all this we not only value and reverence it, but we would—if we were let alone—treat even its blemishes with a tender hand.

But we are not let alone. The false friends of the Bible—viz., those who worship its very letter as the infallible word of God, come to us with an angry summons to bow our proud reasons at its feet; to submit our whole souls to its manifold and diverse statements; to accept it all from beginning to end as equally precious, equally divine. *Against this claim* Rationalism makes its revolt. To us, all sacred books of every country and race are on the same level as regards their authority. We see no reason for accepting one set as of divine authority any more than another set. The Bible—although in one sense it is the best book in the world—has no greater claim to divine origin than the Koran of the Mahommedan, the Vedas of the Hindu, or the She-king of the Chinese; all alike have some excellence, though the Bible has the greatest; all alike have grave faults; all alike have a legendary history shrouded in unbelievable myths. Each in turn is claimed by its votaries to be the only infallible word of God. But

in every case these books reach you and me through the hands of living fallible men, who have, in like manner, received them from other men, and who present them for our acceptance on human testimony alone. As Rationalists we dismiss at once all these pretensions to divine origin, or postpone their acceptance until the claims have been made good by sufficient evidence. And when we come to examine the so-called word of God, we find it not merely written in the ordinary forms of human language, but crowded from end to end with marks of human ignorance, human infirmity, and human error. (This assertion I will make good next Sunday evening by illustrations drawn from the Bible itself.) If any testimony had been produced equal to such tremendous claims, so as to win our confidence, that confidence would have been shattered to pieces after a careful study of any single book in the whole collection. In fact, if it could be proved anyhow that the Bible is a revelation from God, bestowed upon man by superhuman means, it would only have the effect of degrading God in the eyes of men; of making them believe that the words "good," "holy," "pure," "truthful," and "trustworthy" had one meaning when applied to men, and an opposite meaning when applied to God.

And here in this Bible-bound country, I tell you, this is exactly what has happened. Wherever the ministers have persuaded the people to believe the Bible to be an infallible revelation from God, the people have imbibed gross and degrading notions of God's moral

character and government. In proportion as they have believed the whole Bible to be the word of God, their conceptions of the divine character and dealings have become debased. Even the nobility and the splendour of *some* of the conceptions of God in the Bible could not avail to neutralise the deformity of other conceptions. If *all* of them were equally true and equally of divine origin, the mind could only conclude that God, however noble and good—sometimes—was also fickle and capricious, partial and untrustworthy.

The Rationalist, however fallible he may be, has a uniform standard by which to measure conflicting representations of the Divine character and conduct. The Bible-worshipper has none. The Rationalist, once set free from slavish prostration before the book as a whole, can deliberately pick and choose which he will adopt as the most likely to be true out of the various and contradictory utterances before him. The Bible-worshipper puts off his reasoning powers at the door of the shrine, and, if he can, he schools himself into unreasoning submission to the oracle, knowing that, if he once begin to think, he is undone. Confusion and moral perplexity are waiting to engulph him.

Still there are found deeply logical minds who will attack the Rationalist on rational grounds. I will give you the substance of a conversation held between a very eminent Roman Catholic dignitary and myself. He was arguing for the Church, but his arguments, *mutatis mutandis*, will do equally well for the Bible, and have been used in the interests of both.

"You seem to me," said he, "quite right in your natural religion—*i.e.*, you believe in a perfectly good God, who loves mankind." "You also recognise and admit that we have not by nature a perfect knowledge of that God, and that unless He reveals Himself to us and gives us aid, we are sure to be more or less in error respecting Himself, our duty, and our destiny. Is it not, then, to be expected of Him that He would make a revelation of Himself and of His will, such as we might implicitly trust and obey? You have already three out of the four pillars of the truth," he continued, "and only the fourth remains—viz., the Church Catholic is that revelation."

Of course the Bible Protestant would have said all this, with one exception. He would have substituted the word "Bible" for that of the "Church." Now, I confess this argument pleased me. It was not built in a day it was not only the outcome of years and years of study, by which the whole question could be condensed into a nut-shell, but it gathered up in the fewest possible words the unquestioned conclusions of natural religion and the aspirations of devout but sceptical men. I could not but admit the perfect goodness of God and our own earnest desire to know Him and His will; and it did not seem for the moment unreasonable to expect Him to gratify these aspirations, and to open before us the pathway which leads to Himself and to unblemished goodness.

But another instant of thought led me to perceive that the craving for an infallible guide is as unreason-

able as it is vain. And so I made answer somewhat to this effect:—God has already given us a guide to Himself and to His will, *adequate for His present purposes with us.* I know it is not infallible; I know that it will not save me the trouble of thinking for myself, nor prevent my learning wisdom by my own errors. I know that I shall still have to search for truth to the end of my days, and shall only gain a little—a very little, just to keep up my appetite for more. It will, however, be light enough to make my path glad and tolerably sure; and if not enough for this, it will at least tell me what I am bound to do for my fellow men. In any case, this revelation which I carry in my own heart is far better than any which has yet been presented to me, either in Bible or Church. Such knowledge as I have already in my own heart, at least assures me that *God is as well disposed towards me as I am to others in my best moods*; and as for duty, He tells me it all in one breath, "Do as you would be done by."

I therefore venture to think that an infallible revelation, one that was complete and final, would paralyse a considerable portion of human faculty, and destroy the best energies of the soul. It would do more harm than good, and if it saved some doubting hearts from fear, it would also render faith and trust impossible, and instead of manly self-reliance on a healthy activity of mind, there would be nothing but the helplessness of the infant, or the imbecility of the idiot; we should become mere machines, and our highest faculties would cease to work in the

noblest region of human thought, because their occupation would be gone. My answer, then, is "We do not want the infallible revelation of which you speak—at least, not yet—and we shall do a great deal better without it." Of course, it would have been no answer to him to add, "God has never yet given us such a revelation," because that is just the question between the Revelationist and the Rationalist. It was enough to decline with thanks the offered boon, and to say, as politely as possible, "I can walk very well; I feel your crutches would not add to my safety or my speed."

But what a grand thing it is, my friends, to have got far away and beyond the childish longing for the impossible—to be content, even in matters of religion, with such things as we have—to rejoice in all that God has actually given to us, without craving for the privileges which can only come to us as we grow up to be capable of enjoying them! An infallible revelation from God to man by Church or priest or Bible, would be the greatest curse which he could add to our perplexities. Were it possible for a moment, it would only have the effect of undoing in one stroke all His wise discipline and cultivation of our varied faculties. We are a hundred times richer as we are in our partial knowledge of God and duty, than we could ever be if He were to draw the veil which now enshrouds part of his glory from our view. We have what is even better than the full knowledge; we have faculties, which grow by the very effort to know; eyes which grow keener to perceive

truth and beauty, the more vigilant they are in search of them. We have a living organism for perpetual joy in progress, which a sudden rush of prematurity would instantly destroy.

As a Rationalist, then, I thank God for the imperfections and short-comings of this present life, no less than for its abounding benefits and privileges. I am thankful that he has at no time and in no place given an infallible revelation to man, and that the Bible and the Churches alike expose their human origin by human imperfections, follies, and falsehoods, which no artifice can disguise.

Thus set free from bondage to external authority, Rationalism enables us to criticise the contents of these pretended Revelations, and to combat the dogmas deduced from them.

And how does Rationalism effect this? By the same simple method as that which enabled us to discard the pretended Revelation in the first instance. We fall back upon an axiom of surprising simplicity which every one, however learned or however ignorant, can appreciate and recognise at the first glance.

It is this—GOD IS AT LEAST AS GOOD AS WE ARE.

Whatever infinite difference there may be between us and Him, He must ever be above and not below, in moral excellence, the highest creature which he has made. If there be a God at all—and you must not suppose that I doubt, because I say "if"—if there be a God at all, He must be at least as good as the noblest of men, and of course immeasurably better. I call this the fundamental axiom on which

all true religious ideas rest. If religious ideas are ever at variance with it, they are false.

It matters not how wide the difference between us and God, the difference must always be in His favour. As the Hebrew prophet says, in the name of God, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways; . . . (but) as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Apply this axiom to any pretended Revelation and the fraud is at once detected. No so-called "revelation" exists in Church or Book, or human life, which does not contain some flaw and blemish patent to the reason and conscience of man.

By the very simplest use of our reasoning faculties we are thus able to correct the errors of former beliefs and to construct one for ourselves. We do not hereby presume to make a creed which is to suit all sorts and conditions of men—still less to make one to last for all time. All we pretend to do, or are able to do, is to say at any given time in our lives, "Such and such must be partly true of God, because it is the best that we can conceive." A man's own heart of course cannot be the measure of his God, but it can always assure him of *what God cannot be*, if it cannot tell him *all that God is*.

Simple as this is, it is a splendid conception, because it provides for so much more than appears on the surface. It practically enforces and encourages morality and all that is noblest in man,

* Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

because each man's conception of what God is will be generally high or low, according to the man's own character and aims. The punishment for a base or sensual life will be aggravated by having gross or mean conceptions of God, and the reward for virtue and high moral effort will be augmented by nobler ones. In proportion as we live noble lives, so will our religion, when we have once escaped the slavery of dogmatism, be noble and grand too. *The better we become, the more we shall learn of the goodness of Him who has made us what we are.*

But to leave this digression, let us come back to the leading dogmas of so-called Revelation, and by a few illustrations show how Rationalism deals with them.

And first, let me say a word or two about miracles.

I have been somewhat severely criticised for having advanced as a theory of Christ's re-appearance after the Crucifixion that He did not really die on the cross. I did not state it dogmatically, nor do I attach any importance to any of those many ways of reconciling the narrative with fact to which we are driven by the exigencies of the case.

But as a Rationalist it is a matter of no concern to me whether Jesus did or did not die on the Cross. In either case His self-sacrifice for truth was the same. Neither does it concern me to know whether He really rose again after death or not. If I were to see with my own eyes a dead person come out alive from the tomb, I should only marvel at a wonder which I could not explain; but I should never dream of relying implicitly on all that that

person might tell me, simply because he possessed a secret unknown to myself. I should still submit all his assertions to my reason and moral sense. Miracles, in fact, are of no earthly use in helping us to discern truth from error.

The first dogma which I will consider is of course the doctrine of the Trinity, and on no other subject have the Rationalists been so unfairly reproached as they have been in regard to their rejection of this dogma.

The advocates of Revelation are perfectly right in saying that there are subjects beyond the grasp of human reason, and that when they cannot be disproved, the reason should submit before what it cannot comprehend. The Rationalists are quite ready to go with the orthodox thus far; but there is a distinction which is either ignorantly or wilfully overlooked, and which makes all the difference between our position and theirs. There are real things *above* reason, and imaginary things *contradictory* to reason. We willingly concede the existence of the former, while we resolutely deny that of the latter. To give but one example of things above the grasp of reason—infinity, *e.g.*, infinity of space, and infinity of minuteness. Our minds are simply incapable of grasping these ideas so as to comprehend and realise them. The telescope in one hand and the microscope in the other make the idea of infinity in all directions appear reasonable, all the while that we know we cannot comprehend it. We bow before it as a mystery not to be fathomed by the human

mind in its present stage of development. But how different this is from the case of a doctrine which palpably contradicts already well-ascertained deductions of reason! When you tell me that one and the same body can occupy two distinct separate portions of space, both equal to itself in magnitude, at one and the same moment, you are not offering to my reason an idea which is above its comprehension, but one which gives the lie to all previous certainties of experience with regard to bodies and space.

So when you tell me there is a God infinite in power, wisdom and goodness, yet absolutely invisible and everywhere present, you are telling me what is actually above my comprehension, but yet it in no way contradicts any reasonable conviction or any facts cognizable by experience. If you should tell me that there are one, two, or three such Beings, I cannot contradict you. It may be so; however unlikely or unnatural to my inward instincts, there is nothing absolutely unreasonable in the statement. Only when having said there are three, in these words, "Every person by himself is God and Lord, and the three persons are co-eternal and co-equal," you insist, moreover, on there being only *one*, my reason revolts, and I say, This is a little too much. Either there is one God, or there are three; both statements cannot be equally true. We do not set ourselves arrogantly to decide on questions intrinsically greater than our capacities. We submit our reasons to conjectures which are due to the devout aspirations of the soul, so long as they are not unreason-

able; but the moment you demand assent, or the submission of the reason to statements palpably contradictory to each other, and admitted to be so, we reject your doctrine as an absurdity, and trample on it as an insult to our manhood.

The next in order of the "revealed" doctrines is that which concerns our relation to God. We are told that God made one man and one woman perfect, but that their perfection was so slight, or so ill-fortified, that this perfect couple broke the first law which God had given them to keep. This theory is palpably absurd. It is shattered at the lightest breath of inquiry. We are more concerned in knowing that we are told how angry God was with the frail pair, and how he cursed all their posterity on account of their one transgression, sentencing them to endless life in inextinguishable torments. It is only fair to state that many of the Bibliolaters are now writing books to prove that the Bible never taught this; but this is what the orthodox always do; as soon as any doctrine is on the verge of decay they rise up and say, "it is not in the Bible," though the Bible has been made responsible for it for centuries. They will next try to prove that the Bible does not teach us to believe in a devil. Revelation expects us to believe that the Creator goes on creating, or allows us to go on begetting, generations and generations of creatures whom He hates, and that every baby born into the world is under the curse of Almighty God, not through any fault of its own, but only for the sin of our first parents. Now, Rational-

ism not only perceives the high degree of improbability of such a theory, but calls in the aid of our moral sense to decide whether a god who could deal thus with his creatures would be entitled to the smallest degree of reverence or affection. The case is only stated to be dismissed. A being whose notions of right and wrong were so awfully inverted must, in the eyes of all good men, be a fiend and not a god. We ask ourselves, as very imperfect and very thoughtless moral beings, "Would we bring one child into the world to suffer such a fate if we could prevent it? Could we ever forgive ourselves if we had run the risk of producing a single being who should suffer the torments of everlasting woe?" If not, then we tear up that hideous doctrine of an universal curse which blasphemes our Creator a thousand-fold more than all the scoffing atheists have ever been able to do in their worst hours of intoxicated ribaldry.

We come next to the scarcely less blasphemous dogma of the atonement—a doctrine which teaches how the Creator, almighty to curse, is yet impotent to redeem; how even the redemption of the few is only to be obtained by a discreditable bargain, and when stated in the mildest form is still so repulsive to our moral sense as to excite our horror instead of our gratitude.

Its mildest form is that God, moved with pity and love for perishing men, and wishing to rescue them from the yawning hell, sent his dearly beloved Son (another of the three Gods) to come on earth to live

and die as a man, in order, by his sufferings and death, to pay that "debt to justice," as it is called, which men owed to their Maker. The one Son was innocent, and the rest guilty; and an attempt is made to teach us that this transaction was just and good. If it be so, indeed, what are we bound to do but to follow it out in our domestic and social and national lives? If this were right, we ought to sacrifice the innocent son or daughter for the penalty incurred by the wayward and wicked children of the family; to sacrifice the most virtuous and noble member of any given society for the offences of the depraved, and to rescue every criminal from justice by the sacrifice of the nation's best and holiest men. Rationalism, you see, will not be content to take half a truth, or to refrain from following out any doctrine to its legitimate consequences. Whatever God does must be right—this is our axiom. We live in hopes of resembling His perfect goodness, and growing up into His image. If He did this thing—if he accepted the death of Christ in lieu of the penalty of eternal hell for man's sin—it must be our duty to carry out the principle, and follow in His steps. Let the believers in the atonement try it; let them put their belief to the test the very next time a son becomes profligate, or a daughter brings them to shame.

The Rationalist feels sure that two wrongs cannot make a right; that it was monstrously immoral to atone for the sins of the world through the foreordained commission of one great crime. He feels

sure also that it is inherently unjust to treat as guilty one who was innocent; or to treat as innocent, those who are guilty. He has only to open his eyes to the facts around him, and to the lessons of his own experience, to see that the death of Christ has not at all taken away the sins of the world, neither the sins nor the punishment. Men sin on as before, and they are punished as before. Suffering by remorse, if not by temporal penalties, all the just and inevitable consequences of their guilt. Christ, I say again, has not redeemed the world, either from its sin or from its punishment. For saying this, I of course expose myself to that eternal hell of which the Christians boast. Then I ask, what becomes of their atonement and redemption, if I am to be lost in spite of it? What is it worth? I am myself very dear to some who believe in the Atonement, and my rejection of it is a distress to them indeed; what must they think of a God who either cannot save me, or else cares less for me than my relations do? What a God to believe in and worship!

Now, while Rationalism leads us to abjure all these frightful misconceptions of our relation to God, it gives the clue to other conceptions of it, which at all events are in harmony with reason and our moral sense. If it cannot yet account for all the evil in the world, or trace it with certainty to its true origin, it leads us at every step to believe in final good to all our race. At every turn in the enquiry, the thoughtful man is reminded, "Remember God must be at least as good as you." He is moreover, better,

wiser, and abler. And this serves the double purpose of destroying and building up. With one hand, as it were, we tear down the rubbish, and with the other we build up stone by stone the lovely temple of faith, and hope, and love, designed and surveyed by the combined skill of the reason, the conscience, and the heart.

But Rationalism does more than this, it leads us to detect the errors at their fountain-head. We can put our finger on the points at which nobler conceptions become polluted by baser ones. This may be illustrated by the doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus. It was, at first, absolutely a step in the right direction, to deify Christ, to set him up, man as he was, and encompassed with human infirmity, above the Gods of the nations which were round about him. *They* did well who first saw in the life of a pure-minded and disinterested Galilean peasant, finer outlines of Godhead than they had looked upon in the galleries of Jewish or Pagan imagery. It was, one might almost say, a necessary part of the transition from a darker into a brighter stage of humanity. But the mischief was that the stepping stone was clung to after it should have been abandoned, and the rising waters have cut it off from the receding shore. When men had time to listen to what Jesus had to say, they *should have* listened, instead of drowning the simple words of his faith in the histrionic chorus of Christian ceremonies. He was, up to the light of his day, a true Rationalist, and as great a heretic as any that were burned

afterwards in his honour. Among many true and wise sayings, he said, "If ye being evil, know how to be kind to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father be kind to you." This was his key to the perplexing riddles of man's condition and destiny, and is precisely the weapon which Rationalism puts into our hands. Not on that account, or any account, would we worship him, but for that we must do him honour, and speak reverently even of his faults. The Rationalist admits of no authority in matters of faith, not even of Jesus Christ, whose sayings, not less than those of Paul, Peter, or John, must pass through the crucible of common sense.

Rationalism so far elevates our conception of God, that we are approaching the epoch in which our own utter incapacity to comprehend the mode of His existence will be fully recognised. We cling tenaciously to anthropomorphic terms, but all the while we know they are utterly inadequate to express the truths which we *feel after* much more than we can be said to *know*.

The idea of a Man-God was never more deeply cherished in Christendom than it is now—that is, those who are Christians value that part of their belief above every other, and are only honest in calling those men "infidels" who deny it, because Jesus is to them the only God they care about or really believe in. But while this idolatry is become intenser in the orthodox churches, the idolaters are losing in numbers every day. The Man-God theory

cannot stand long in the presence of two formidable foes—Science and the Bible. Yes, I mean what I say—Science and the Bible together will pull down the idolatry of Jesus. Science is every day and hour enlarging our conception of God and His works, and correcting hundreds of errors; and the Bible is becoming more read and better known. Consequently, Bible-readers cannot read attentively what the New Testament says of Christ without perceiving its violent discord with that scientific thought which more or less draws every one within its powerful influence.

Bible-readers will see that their Man-God believed in miracles, in devils, and in many things which a mind trained in science cannot tolerate for a moment. They will see that their Man-God believed the earth to occupy a much more important astronomical position than it really does. That it was geographically about a thousandth part of its real size; that it was geometrically a vast plain of irregular surface, but which could be all seen at once from the top of a very high mountain. The Gospels will also inform Bible-readers that the Man-God believed that the Father lived in a real dwelling-place immediately above the country of Syria, and that he had twelve legions of angels ready to come down and fight for him if necessary; that he was going up to sit on the right hand of a real throne of God, and after a brief absence (he could not tell how long, but it would be before his followers were all dead) he would come down again to the Mount of Olives and gather round

him all the men, women and children who had ever lived on the earth, and there he would reign at least a thousand years on the throne of his ancestor, David.

Well, all this, I say, will quickly destroy the belief in the Godhead of Jesus. While scientific thought was unknown, there was nothing to shock the reason in all this Gospel narrative of wonders past and to come. But now, if you educate men in astronomy, geology, geography, and physical science of all kinds and give them the Bible to read along with it, it is a matter of certainty that the dogmas of orthodoxy will be abandoned, and the first to give way before the pressure of true knowledge will be the long-cherished belief in the Godhead of Christ. It will be seen at a glance that a being so necessarily unacquainted with the laws of nature as Christ was, could not have been the Lord of Nature, and that one who did not even know that the earth was a globe, could scarcely have been its Omnipotent Creator.

After this, I hardly think it worth while to touch on the more trivial points of dogma which Rationalism overthrows. At all events, there are things which we may think trivial, but they occupy an enormous amount of human interest and eager excitement. I must in some future lecture take up the prolific subjects of sacraments, rites, and ceremonies, sabbath observance, priestcraft, and the various occasions in which, by common consent, we call in the offices of ministers of religion. Believe me, there is no little work to be done in freeing every one of these holes and corners of their accumulated dust and rubbish.

I intend also to follow up this lecture on Sunday next in this hall by one which will verify, word for word, by illustrations drawn from the Bible itself, all that I have said against its infallibility.

I would only repeat once more, even to weariness, the true principle of Rationalism. It is the assertion of our own divine right to think for ourselves, and to take nothing for granted on the authority of men, Churches or books. In matters of religion, nothing has any right to mediate between ourselves and God; nothing can, without shameless falsehood, assert a claim of Divine authority, which is to over-ride our own faculties and to regulate our convictions. Let us keep all our reverence for things really sacred, but never suffer that reverence to degenerate into superstition, much less into idolatry. Let us brave all opinion, and be beguiled by no praise; if need be, standing alone, our back to the wall, and the world before us and against us, God within us, fortifying our hearts to be ever true to truth, cost what it may, and lead where it will. Let us be diffident and yet confident, modest and yet exulting, grave and yet glad, knowing that "God has not given to us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind."

LECTURE ON THE BIBLE.

PART I.

THIS evening I shall endeavour to fulfil the promise made in my Lecture on Rationalism, that I would verify, by illustrations drawn from the Bible itself, all that I have said against the doctrine of its infallibility.

I do not ask for your indulgence so much as for your pity, in having to perform a task which must deprive me more than ever of the esteem of many good men.

At the outset, I must confess that it is an odious and a thankless task to have to show up the faults of a venerable book which has been the fruitful source of blessing and happiness to countless millions of our race, and which is to me, this very day, both dear and precious. The very faults which I have to hold up for your censure are by no means exceptionally bad, when considered in the light of those times in which they occurred. Some of them are common human blemishes, which any of our best men in the 19th century might have fallen into, had they lived and written in those early times.

Nay, I am not sure that in every period throughout those 2000 or 3000 years supposed to be covered by the Biblical writings, the Bible writers were not always in advance of their own times, and that their views of God and of duty were not, at each successive point, superior to those views which prevailed in other nations around them. Thus what now appear to us as faults were, by comparison, originally great merits, whereby alone the books of the Bible obtained their supremacy over the literature of the world. To illustrate this, let me remind you of the story of Abraham offering up Isaac. We will criticise it from another point of view by and by. At this moment, I ask you to look at it in the light of those times in which Abraham lived. The narrative, at least, assures us that the Patriarch resisted the temptation to offer up his son as a burnt-offering; and in overcoming it, Abraham most surely made a protest against the horrible human sacrifices which prevailed around him, and which he so narrowly escaped imitating. Bad as things seem to be, and really are, in some of the Bible records, it is more than probable that they were not nearly so bad as much that went on among the Gentile races which were cöeval with the personages in the Bible histories. Moreover, the Bible contains so much that is true and beautiful, so much that will never perish so long as men aspire to virtue and communion with God, that the whole world would be a loser if its pages were to be closed for ever, and its precious words forgotten. In proper hands, and

read in a reasonable common-sense manner, by persons whose minds are absolutely free from superstitious reverence for it, the Bible may still be, and I hope will ever be, a source of delight and instruction—a text-book of praise and worship, and a treasury of examples of all that good men admire.

My opponents, then, will not accuse me of approaching this subject without due reverence for what is really reverend, or without a becoming tenderness for those pious feelings which have thrown a halo around this venerable book—feelings in which I myself share, and which I should be sorry to lose.

This present work is forced upon us by those who have placed the Bible before us in a false light, who have made claims of Divine origin and authority for the book which the book does not make for itself, and who have foolishly and suicidally affirmed, that if the Bible be not infallibly true from beginning to end, it is of no value at all.

Our opponents are not all agreed in their views of the Bible, but I shall endeavour to answer them all at once. Their leading positions are the following :—

Some Revelationists affirm that the Bible is all true from beginning to end, that "every letter, every word," and so on, has been written under the direct inspiration of God, and is, therefore, of one uniform Divine authority throughout.

This class I shall endeavour to answer by showing that there are absolute and irreconcileable contradictions between one part of the Bible and another

part; and that in the Bible there are downright falsehoods. One such instance, of course, would be sufficient to overthrow the position taken by this class. Another class of Bibliolators affirms, that though there may be errors in science, history, chronology, and geography, in the Bible, yet on one point it is absolutely and invariably true, viz., in its religious and moral teaching.

This class will be answered by showing that the religious and moral teaching in the Bible is not uniform nor coherent, but in some places contradictory of itself, and that some of the religious teaching is degrading to God, and some of the so-called moral teaching is degrading to man.

Another class, driven from both of these positions, has finally taken refuge in that part of the Bible which relates the history of Jesus Christ, and they affirm that although the Bible is full of errors, scientific, historical, etc., and even religious and moral, yet the teachings and life of Jesus were absolutely perfect, without the slightest blemish or defect. This class will be answered by my illustrating, from the Gospels, certain moral blemishes in the character and life of Jesus, and even in parts of his teaching, as reported in the Gospels themselves.

But I beg you to observe, and especially desire any opponents who may be present to observe, that the whole and sole aim of this Lecture is to refute the ideas *that the Bible is infallible and that Jesus was no less than the Almighty God.* I stand here to-

night with this single purpose; I do not come here to make men love the truths of the Bible less than they did before, or to regard with diminished homage the noble life and beautiful teaching of Jesus himself. I attack only the extravagant notions that the Bible is all true, that its moral and religious teachings are infallible, and that Jesus was more than man and free from every human blemish.

My arguments will be addressed to your reason, your consciences, and your hearts. "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say."

First of all, I would warn all the spectators in this contest against the tactics of orthodoxy. They will be told that all these objections to the Bible are old, and have been answered over and over again. To this my reply is, that I have searched in vain for any satisfactory answers to them, and have never found them; my reputation and my future prospects as a teacher of religion are at stake in this evening's work. I offer *these* as a pledge that I am going to speak honestly of the Bible, and not wilfully to misrepresent any part of it; and also that I am not going to make myself a laughing-stock by bringing forward objections which have really been already satisfactorily answered. Another of the orthodox manœuvres is not to allow us to take the words of the Bible as they stand, but they insist on altering an ugly passage by the change or withdrawal of a word or two so as to get rid of a difficulty which cannot otherwise be overcome. The school represented by the Rev. F. D. Maurice is eminently

skilful in this manipulation of texts. In my opinion, if this be permissible, then any text may be made to give any meaning, and the greatest possible comfort may be drawn from an Athanasian Creed. The attempt to alter and modify passages in the Bible should at once be recognised as an admission that those passages are not God's word, which of course it would be impious to tamper with or to attempt to improve.

I may be called very narrow and arbitrary, but I insist upon keeping close to the plain sense of the words in our authorised Bible, which the ministers of religion of all denominations put, without any warning, into the hands of every one who can be got to read it. Revision of translation is no doubt necessary, and if conducted fairly, would in many instances be unfavourable to orthodoxy. But until we have a new authorised version, we must use the old one.

I will give you the book, the chapter, and the verse for every quotation which I shall make. I cannot render myself "infallible" for the occasion or else I surely would; but I may safely say, that if a wiser head or a keener eye than my own should discover a blunder or two in my remarks, those few possible blunders will not detract more than a grain from the weight of the crushing evidence which will still remain.

If all my quotations *but one* could be explained and harmonised satisfactorily, and that one irreconcileable contradiction or moral blemish remained, it would be enough to accomplish my task of refuting

the infallibility of the Bible. My work divides itself into the following sections, though here and there they may unavoidably overlap one another:—

(1.) I shall adduce a few illustrations of contradiction pure and simple.

(2.) I shall cite passages of Scripture which attribute to God feelings or conduct unworthy of Deity.

(3.) Passages which directly or indirectly inculcate wrong-doing or bad motives in man.

(4.) Passages from the Gospels illustrating the human error and infirmity of Jesus, inconsistent with the idea of His being God.

(1.) Contradictions, Pure and Simple.

The first instance which I will notice is the contradiction between the two versions of the Ten Commandments as given in Deuteronomy v. and Exodus xx.

The Fourth Commandment, as given in Deuter. v. 12, 13, 14, 15, runs thus—

"Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in

the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day." (Please to notice the reason here given for the observance of the Sabbath day).

Now at the end of the ten commandments here given in Deuteronomy v. (see verse 22) we read "*These words* the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: *and he added no more.* And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me."

Compare this with Exodus xx. In the 1st verse we read "God spake all these words, saying." Then follow the Ten Commandments as we read them in Church, and the Fourth Commandment (ver. 8—11) runs thus: "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it."

Here we find two glaring contradictions—first, a different reason for the ordinance of the Sabbath is given in Exodus to that given in Deuteronomy, and

if "*God added no more*" than those words given in Deuteronomy, he could not have added the reason assigned for the Sabbath as given in Exodus.

Another instance of contradiction is where one and the same act is ascribed in one place to God, in another place to the Devil. In 2 Samuel xxiv. 1, we read, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. Ver. 10, "And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done."

In 1 Chronicles xxi. 1—7, the same event is thus described, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel . . . . And God was displeased with this thing ; therefore he smote Israel."

In Genesis xxii. 1, it is written, "God did tempt Abraham." In James i. 13, it is written, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

This is a case in which shuffling is resorted to. Opponents will say the word "tempt" does not mean to tempt, but to "try one's faith ;" to which I reply for the present by asking on what authority do you give a totally different sense to the same word in a book written by one and the same Divine Being? If this is God's word, what right have you to say that He does not exactly mean what He has written? We shall come to the temptation of Abraham presently.

1 Samuel, xv. 10, 11. "Then came the Word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king." Verse 29 says, "And also the Strength of Israel (God?) will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent."

Exodus xx. 5 (2nd Commandment). "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." Compare this with Jer. xxxi. 29, 30, "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." And this from Ezekiel xviii. 20, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son."

Deuteronomy xxiv. 16. "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

This was quoted and acted upon. 2 Kings xiv. 6, "The children of the murderers he slew not; according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses."

It is the boast of Bible-worshippers that we should have no ground for belief in immortality were it not for the Bible. I beg to remind them of the following passages, which distinctly teach that there is no life after death:—

Psalm vi. 5. "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee

thanks?" This occurs in a prayer offered up in sickness that the speaker's life may be spared.

Isaiah xxxviii.18. "The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth."

Job xiv. 10, 12 and 14. "Man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. If a man die, shall he live again?"

Eccles. ix. 5, 6. The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun."

Verse 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Eccles. iii. 19. "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast."

The inspired Solomon certainly had no faith in immortality. And his words are contradicted both in the Old and New Testaments repeatedly.

The contradictions in the New Testament, where they are not merely verbal, can only be proved by quoting very long passages. But they include the following:—

Luke accounts for the whole time of Jesus' infancy in this way. After his birth in Bethlehem (Luke ii. 22) his parents took him to Jerusalem to perform some religious ceremony in the temple, when he was 40 days old, and then at once departed (Luke ii. 39) into Galilee to their own city, Nazareth, and from there they went every year up to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover (41).

The youth of Jesus was thus accounted for till he was 12 years old.

Now Matthew ii. says that immediately after the birth of Jesus his parents carried him down into Egypt. Moreover, in the first three Gospels it is affirmed that Jesus did not openly and publicly claim to be the Messiah, and that when Peter acknowledged him to be the Messiah (Matt. xvi. 16—20), Jesus "charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." Whereas the fourth Gospel (John i. 41, John iv. 25, 26) describes Jesus as openly claiming the title of Christ, or Messiah, from the very beginning of his ministry, not only among the Jews, but also among the Samaritans.

It is impossible to get over a contradiction like this. Take again the intentional omission by Matthew from the genealogy of David's descendants, of no less than four persons, only to make his assertion appear to be true that there were three periods of fourteen generations each.

Moreover, both the genealogies in Matthew and Luke say they trace to Joseph—not to Mary—and

yet both the books say that Joseph was not the real father of Jesus; how then could Jesus be descended from David through a man who was not his progenitor at all; The names purposely omitted by Matthew are Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah in one place, and Pedaiah in another place.—See 1 Chron. iii. 11, 12, and 18.

In the first three Gospels Jesus is represented as going to the wilderness *immediately* after his baptism, and being there 40 days. In the fourth Gospel he is said to be on the third day at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and not a word is said about the wilderness or the temptation. If he was not in two places at once, one of the two varying accounts must be false.

Again the first three Gospels fix the day of the last supper on the night of the Passover; the fourth Gospel makes it the night before that. To prevent mistake, in John xiii. 29 we find that after the supper Jesus says something to Judas understood to be an order to buy what was necessary for the morrow's celebration. According to this Jesus was crucified on a Thursday, and not on a Friday.

The inscription on the cross, though copied down by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is different in the different inspired books.

Matthew xxvii. 37. "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Mark xv. 26. "The King of the Jews."

Luke xxiii. 38. "This is the King of the Jews."

John xix. 19. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

1 Cor. xv. 5. Paul says Christ was seen of the 12 apostles after his resurrection, whereas there were only 11, if Judas had hanged himself; and the 12th apostle, Matthias, was not elected till after the ascension.

Human beings might easily fall into such discrepancies in their reports; but God certainly could not have done so.

Then there are all the endless contradictions between Kings and Chronicles, and between the first three and the fourth Gospels; between the several narratives of the Resurrection; between the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. It is impossible to enumerate them. In place of this, I beg to refer you to the following admirable books, which deal with these subjects at length.

"*The Hebrew Monarchy*," by Professor FRANCIS W. NEWMAN.

"*The Creed of Christendom*," by W. R. GREG; and a new and very complete work, entitled

"*The Bible, is it the Word of God?*" by T. LUMISDEN STRANGE.

"*The Finding of the Book*," by JOHN ROBERTSON, of Coupar Angus.

"*John or the Apocalypse*," by Rev. PHILIP DESPREZ, Vicar of Alvediston.

"*The English Life of Jesus*," published by THOMAS SCOTT, Esq., of Ramsgate.

"*The Fourth Gospel*, by the Rev. J. J. TAYLOR.

PART II.

I COME now to the consideration of those passages which attribute to God feelings or conduct unworthy of Deity. It must be observed that very many of these passages will apply equally to the third branch of our subject, viz., to instances in which wrong-doing, or bad motives, are directly or indirectly inculcated upon men.

As the chief aim of this enquiry is to correct popular impressions as to the MORAL character of God, I pass over those passages in which God is described as walking upon earth, talking face to face with men, and even eating and drinking with them—all of which are totally at variance with our modern conceptions of the Divine Being.

In Gen. vi. 5—7, we read, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

Here is a degrading picture of the Almighty and All-wise God. He is represented as having made a grievous mistake, and being sorry for it. "It grieved him at his heart." He has created a race

of men incurably wicked, and there is nothing for it but to destroy them. Not content, however, with destroying the wicked men and women, he must needs destroy the innocent beasts, and creeping things, and the fowls of the air, as though he could not destroy man without destroying all creation as well.

In Gen. viii. 21, after Noah's sacrifice of one of every sort of clean animals, "the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." Why? One would expect it was because they were now going to be good—not at all. God goes on to say, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done." The same reason is given for God's sparing men, as was given before for his destroying them; as much as to imply that God had acted on an impulse of savage and indiscriminate rage, which had also proved to be futile, and when he had had time for reflection, or after being appeased by a burnt-offering, he resolved never to do so again.

In Gen. xii. 11—20, we have an account of a deliberate lie told by Abraham, in order—not to protect the honour of his wife—but to save himself from being murdered on her account. I will not read the whole passage, but ver. 17, tells us that God punished—not Abraham for his falsehood—but poor Pharaoh for his being deceived. "The Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife." Pharaoh had taken

her on Abram's own statement that Sarai was his sister, and being purely innocent he was yet punished as guilty, while the cowardly and guilty Abram goes free.

In chap. xx., a similar scene is recorded between Abraham and Abimelech, King of Gerar, Sarah being dangerously beautiful at more than 90 years of age (Gen. xvii. 17). In ver. 9, Abimelech asks Abraham, in reference to his falsehood, "What have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." And yet in ver. 7, God is represented as saying to Abimelech, "Abraham is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live." And in ver. 17, "So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants."

Any child in a Sunday-school would learn from this passage that God was monstrously unjust, because Abimelech had not even laid his hand upon Sarah, whereas all the wrong done, or intended, was the direct result of Abraham's lie. For the benefit of those who do not know their Bible, it is striking to observe that a similar affair is related also of Isaac and Rebekah, and Abimelech, King of Gerar, in chap. xxvi. of the same book.

We come now to the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen. xxii.). To state it briefly, it was either wrong or right for Abraham to kill and burn his son on an altar as a sacrifice to God. If it was right, why did God stop him from doing it? It was wrong, and God knew it. Then since it was

wrong to do this, it was unworthy of God to tempt Abraham to do it; to command him to do it; to keep that wicked purpose harboured in his heart all those three days of silent agony. It was horrible in a Divine Being to suggest so odious a thought as that of child-murder, and that, to satisfy his own craving for human sacrifice. The whole story may be easily and satisfactorily explained by reference to the customs of the time, except that part of it which describes God as tempting Abraham, and commanding him to do a wicked deed.

We pass now to the Book of Exodus. In the Second Commandment (Exodus xx. 5), the reason urged by God against idolatry is that he is a "jealous God," *i.e.*, jealous of the false gods. This is not a noble trait in any human character, even though it be very natural to man; how much more then, is it unworthy of God!

If you ask a child who has been trained in a Sunday-school, "Who are God's favourites among the Bible heroes," he will be sure to mention Abraham and Isaac, ready to sacrifice the virtue of their wives for their own safety; Jacob, the fraudulent and accomplished liar; Lot, a drunkard and worse; David, addicted to bloodshed and lust; and Solomon, a notorious and wholesale profligate. This comes of your indiscriminate Bible teaching.

Exodus iii. 8, the Lord said "I am come down to deliver them (*i.e.*, the Israelites), out of the hand of the Egyptians (ver. 17), and to bring them into the *land of the Canaanites*," etc. Ver. 18, says that God ordered Moses to say unto the King of Egypt, "Let

us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God."

What is this but to teach that the God of all truth did not hesitate to order his prophets to deceive the king in order to secure his purposes?

Verses 21 and 22 of this chapter give God's orders to the Israelitish women to borrow jewels of gold and silver and raiment of the Egyptian women, "And ye shall spoil the Egyptians." This order is repeated in the 11th chapter, verses 2 and 3, where the men are included in the order. Thus God is represented as making them rogues as well as liars. Many times in the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 14th chapters of Exodus, God is described as telling Moses that he would *harden Pharaoh's heart* and the heart of his servants, so that he should not let the people go. And then it is stated on each occasion but one, "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." The Bible-worshippers shall not get out of these obnoxious passages by saying that it was a judicial hardening caused by the sinner himself, for this interpretation is not only flatly contradictory of the words in Exodus, but the Apostle Paul himself cuts off that retreat by adducing this very case of God hardening Pharaoh's heart as an illustration of the doctrines of election and predestination. Rom. ix. 17, 18, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth;" "therefore," adds St. Paul, "therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

We might well ask the Apostle what sort of a name hath this vile representation of God declared throughout all the earth? A name of infamous untrustworthiness and malignity; the name of one who instead of helping to turn a humbled sinner from the error of his ways at the moment of his softening, deliberately stepped in to crush the rising flame of good intention, and to harden his relenting spirit into fresh evil—and all "to show his power!"

That is not the name of "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

These early books abound in such misrepresentations of God, but I must press on and miss a great deal, or else we shall never have done.

In the 32nd chapter of Exodus, verses 9—14, God is represented as being on the point of consuming all the people in His fury, but was kept from doing so by an appeal to His vanity.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." And Moses besought the Lord and said, 'Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath and repent

of this evil against thy people.' And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people."

In Numbers xiv., verses 11—20, a similar scene occurs, in which (ver. 15, 16) Moses says to God, "Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore hath he slain them in the wilderness. Pardon them, I beseech thee . . . . And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word." But now just consider what this pardon amounted to. God goes on to say, ver. 21, "But as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." And how was this "glory" to be shown? Verses 22, 23, tell us, "All those men which have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness," etc., etc., "surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers; neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land, and his seed shall possess it." So, after all, the children of Israel who came out of Egypt, deluded by promises of the land of Canaan, all perished in the wilderness except two, Caleb and Joshua. God was either unable or unwilling to keep his oath which he sware unto them.

On another occasion—the revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—Moses and Aaron again prevent the

destruction of the people, but this time by an appeal to God's sense of justice. Numbers xvi. 20—23, "The Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?" In spite of this plea 14,700 persons died of a plague, besides the 250 insurrectionists who were swallowed up by an earthquake. The plague would have gone on till the last man was dead, if it had not been for Aaron rushing in with a censer full of incense, which made an atonement for the people, and the plague (ver. 47, 48) was stayed. Can any picture of God be more degrading than these?

In Numbers xxi. ver. 4—6, God is represented as having sent fiery serpents among the people only because they complained that they had neither bread nor water, and they did not enjoy the manna. Then in utter forgetfulness of the 2nd commandment already written by God's finger on tables of stone, God, instead of removing the biting serpents, orders Moses to make a fiery serpent of brass, and set it on a pole, that anyone who was bitten might look on it and recover.

In Numbers xxii. verses 20, 21, 22, "And God came to Balaam by night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them. And Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass and went with the princes of Moab. And God's

anger was kindled because he went." Verses 34, 35, after Balaam's conversation with his ass, he sees the angel of the Lord and says, "Now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again," and yet the angel of the Lord says unto Balaam in reply to this, "Go with the men." A thousand asses speaking with a thousand human voices is not so incredible as this monstrous fickleness and injustice here attributed to God.

At your leisure read the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy which abounds in degrading pictures of the Divine character.

In 2 Samuel xxi. 1, we read, "there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites." After seven of Saul's sons had been hung up before the Lord in Gibeah, we read in verse 14, "After that, God was entreated for the land."

2 Sam. xxiv. 1. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." Ver. 15: "So the Lord sent a pestilence which carried off 70,000 men." Ver. 17. David is distressed. He says to God, "Lo, I have sinned and done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."

Here is the creature fairly accusing the Creator of an atrocious act of injustice. As usual, after some

burnt offerings had been made, "the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed," ver. 25.

1 Sam. vi. 19. The Lord smote 50,070 persons in the little village of Beth-shemesh for peeping into the ark. Those that were left are recorded as saying —possibly in bitter irony—"Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"

2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. Uzzah ventured to put forth his hand to keep the ark from falling over, but was killed on the spot in reward for his reverent service.

1 Kings xxii. 19—23. Micaiah, the only true prophet out of 401, who persuaded Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead, says the following: "I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven (heaven only, mark you) standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. And he (*i.e.*, God) said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do so. Now therefore," adds Micaiah, "behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these thy prophets."

Ezekiel, probably referring to this, says, chap. xiv. 9. "If a prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that pro-

phet, and "—can you believe that I am not reading falsely?—"I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him."

The Apostle Paul, too, says (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12), "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth." *

My friends, is it not incredible that such teaching as this should be believed to be the very Word of God—the inspired revelation of His mind and will? Surely Atheism is better than this. With what pretence of justice were Ananias and Sapphira slain for lying unto God, when God is represented as lying unto men? I defy the bibliolators to get over such difficulties as these extracts present. No explanation will avail them but that only which carries the inevitable conclusion that God is represented in parts of the Bible as an immoral being, and not "righteous in all his ways," or "holy in all his works;" that He does not "love truth and equity," and that "lying lips are" not "an abomination unto him," and that He is neither just, nor true, nor trustworthy. I will only say, further, on this point, that I have had to miss many and many an illustration because it is impossible to give them all.

* Father Hyacinthe, in a letter from Rome, dated 22nd June, writes: "God never requires falsehood, but falsehood often has need of God; and it is never so effective as when it presents itself to us in His name."—*Times*, 29th June, 1871.

PART III.

I now come to the third part of our subject, and will cite passages from the Bible which directly or indirectly inculcate what is wrong.

The first group of such passages will consist of those which describe vile and wicked conduct, either without a word of censure or with positive approval.

There is a passage in Gen. xix. 30—38, which I have too much delicacy to read, and in which a gross case of incest is recorded, without a word of censure. The offspring of this crime, Moab and Ammon, are especially protected by God, as you will find on reference to Deut. ii. 9 and 19.

In the story of Rebekah's and Jacob's lying (Gen. xxvii.), which is so familiar to all Bible readers, you will not find one word of censure upon them for their wickedness. Jacob himself is always included in the sacred three, when God calls himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This no one would object to were it not that the meaning is that these three men were special favourites of Jehovah. And to show that this is not my own arbitrary interpretation, I refer you to the prophet Malachi i. 2, 3, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother, saith the Lord; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau;" and to Paul the Apostle, who quotes these words approvingly, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix. 13.).

Jacob was an utterly mean, cowardly, and fraudulent deceiver, and made so by his own mother. Gen xxv. 29—34, says, "And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles."

Gen. xxx. 28—43 gives us an account of how this chosen servant of God cheated his uncle Laban and secured for himself by dishonest means all the best of the flocks and herds. In xxxi. 42, Jacob says to Laban his uncle, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." Wherein he claims that God had not only sanctioned but helped him in his fraudulent dealings.

Esau, on the contrary, who is never praised in the whole Bible, was a fine, noble, generous character, his only recorded fault being the desire to take revenge on Jacob when he had discovered his villany; but his truly magnanimous forgiveness of Jacob afterwards made ample amends for that natural fit of anger.

Jacob's faults pass uncondemned, while Esau is said to be hated by God.

I pass now to the history of David, to notice one

instance of outrageous villany which never receives a word of censure in the Bible.

1 Sam. xxvii. records how David and six hundred men were sheltered and hospitably entertained by Achish, King of Gath (verses 2—6), "He and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, and planted them in a town called Ziklag." Now day by day David and his men made marauding expeditions against the aborigines of the land by whom he was sheltered. Verse 9 tells us that David smote the land, *i. e.*, the Philistine district, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away all the spoil, and came to Achish. (Ver. 10—12.) "And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to day? And David (falsely) answered, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Kenites. . . . . And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, lest they should tell on us. And Achish believed David."

This instance of treachery reminds me of one that must not be left out of this black list. I mean the treachery of Jael (Judges iv.). Like other stories which are so well known, I will not waste time in reciting it all. I only call attention, first, to the extreme sacredness in which Orientalists regard the pledge given and received in acts of hospitality. If food was given and received, it was tantamount to a solemn oath that no harm should be done by one to the other. There is a story told of a robber who entered a house, intending to murder the owner for the sake of his wealth, but that, in

creeping along, his hand touched the walls. He put his hand to his mouth and tasted salt, whereupon he instantly withdrew from the house, gave up his coveted spoils, and confessed afterwards to the owner how his life had been preserved.

I mention this to show how sacred was the implied pledge in hospitality given and received. But what aggravated the conduct of Jael was, that (ver. 17) there was peace between Sisera's king and her husband, Heber the Kenite. As her husband's friend, Jael thus receives Sisera (ver. 18), and says, "Turn in, my lord, turn in; fear not." After being refreshed with a draught of milk from Jael's hand, the weary warrior lies down in perfect security and sleeps. The awful tragedy you know, and one could only extenuate or make excuses for the crime on the possibility of a panic of terror coming over Jael's mind for the safety of her husband, who was thus compromised by sheltering the enemy of the victorious Israelities. But no human heart now-a-days could look upon her act as anything but a crime, and a crime of the deepest dye.

Turn to Judges v., and what do we read? (ver. 24)—"Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be: blessed shall she be above women in the tent." (ver. 31) "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord." These are the words of Deborah, a prophetess—an inspired woman—and this is a part of that Book which even to-day is asserted to be the infallible Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost!

The books of the Kings and Chronicles abound in instances of vile conduct uncensured, or actually commended. I will give you but one—King Jehu. 2 Kings x. 30, informs us that "The Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart; thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." In the 9th chap., verses 6 and 7, we find the command of God to Jehu to "smite the house of Ahab."

Now let us briefly enumerate the acts of Jehu, which were done in obedience to God's command, and which were rewarded by God's approval.

He first shot King Joram, and then ordered the assassination of King Ahaziah (chap. ix. 24, 27); then, by a subtle and explicit message to the Samaritan elders, he obtains the heads of seventy of Ahab's children (chap. x. 5—10), which were packed in baskets and sent to him to Jezreel. The next morning he addresses the people in most hypocritical language—"I conspired against my master and slew him; but who slew all these?" thus pretending to have had nothing to do with that massacre. This he followed up by slaying all the rest of Ahab's relations (ver. 11) and friends, and great men and priests, until he left him none remaining (chap. x. 11). But, with the usual elasticity of Scripture, after they were all slain, there were a great many left, viz., forty-two brethren of Ahaziah (Ahab's son-in-law) and a whole temple full of priests.

The former he slays without a word of warning; the latter he ensnares into his hands by hard lying (chap. x. 18—28). It is plain enough to us to see that Jehu only acted like an unscrupulous usurper, who finds the safety of his throne dependent on the extermination of the late dynasty, while his slaughter of the worshippers of Baal was partly done as a sop to the priests of Jehovah, who had been instrumental in urging his pretensions, and partly to crush all lingering sympathy with the house of Ahab in the minds of the people. He was a consummate dissembler, hypocrite, and murderer; and yet the Bible tells us that he did according to all that was in God's heart, all that was right in God's eyes, and received for so doing God's approval and reward.

Of direct commands which are immoral and degrading there is, alas! a too plentiful supply in the Bible. It is impossible to give more than a few illustrations.

1st. As to the usages of war. God is said to have commanded the slaughter of women and children, even infants and sucklings. Joshua x. 40 sums up an account which must be terribly familiar to the ears of all church-goers:—"So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, *as the Lord God of Israel commanded.*"

In Numbers xxxi. 17 & 18, Moses gives a command to slay every male and every married woman; but the virgins were to be reserved for their own enjoyment.

Lest it should be said that this was only Moses speaking, refer to the 25th and following verses—"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, . . . Divide the prey,"...so and so—32,000 persons, women, *who were virgins.** Ver. 40 says "And the persons were 16,000, of which the Lord's tribute was thirty and two persons." We do not wonder at savage men doing these things; we only ask, in the name of the Holy God how you Bible-worshippers dare to tell us that these were God's commands?

Turn now to Numbers v. 11—34, beginning "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying,"—It is the ordeal for jealousy—No, I cannot read it. It is too disgusting; and if I read it here or in church, I should earn the character of that notorious Protestant lecturer, who is blamed for going about the country exposing the alleged obscenities of the Catholic confessional.

The law of *divorce* (Deuter. xxiv. 1—3), is another instance of immoral commandment; and we have the authority of Jesus for saying so. He upsets the Divine authority for the law, by ascribing it to Moses.

Again, the law of *retaliation* (Deuter. xix. 21), "Thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," is eminently immoral, also reversed by Jesus.

Hosea is commanded (chap. i. 1), to break the Seventh Commandment. (See also chap. iii. 1).

Levit. xxvii. 29, involves human sacrifices, "None devoted shall be redeemed; they shall surely be put

* I have altered the Bible expression out of decency. (v. 35.)

to death." "Every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord." Jephthah, no doubt, acted upon some law like this.

Exod. xxii. 18, enacts a law which has caused thousands and tens of thousands of defenceless women to be murdered—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." What are we to think of a God who knew so little about the men and women he had made as to believe in witchcraft himself? Slavery is also inculcated in Leviticus xxv. 44—46, Thy bondmen and thy bondmaids shalt thou buy of the heathen that are round about you, and of the strangers that do sojourn among you, and ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you; they shall be your bondmen for ever.*

Although the Hebrews might not marry any foreign women, yet they might have as many concubines as they pleased of the captives taken in war, or by purchase. Hence Solomon figures with his 700 wives and 300 concubines—1000 women in all.

Lastly, the Bible itself endorses all that I have said, in these words, from Ezekiel xx. 25, "Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."

I must not omit from this catalogue, those blemishes on the beautiful Psalms, in which Oriental hatred and revenge find such fierce expression. Psalms cix., cxxxvii., are enough to quote in establishment of my argument, while I can assure you that there are very few Psalms in the whole book.

* I have condensed this passage for the sake of brevity.

that are not more or less disfigured by prayers for revenge and curses against foes.

It has been urged by some that the moral teaching of the New Testament is also at fault. No doubt it is imperfect, but it does not deserve to be placed in the same black catalogue as that from which I have drawn the foregoing illustrations. One book of the New Testament, however, has earned our just execration. My sense of justice rose up in rebellion against it when I was but a boy, and I detest the book more than ever now. It is the last in the Bible—the Book of Revelation. In chap. xxii. 18, 19, the writer fiercely but vainly tries to guard his production from being corrupted by transcribers, and this he does by a malediction worthy of the spirit which has ever animated the diabolical side of the Christian church. "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." I only wish the writer of that book could hear me say to him, "Your mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, and your feet are swift to shed blood."

False pretences generally defeat their own end. Let Bibliolators beware of making threats against those who question the Divine origin and infallibility of this book. Those threats will make more rebels than they ever made slaves.

PART IV.

I now come to the last branch of my enquiry—that which relates to Jesus Christ. I will show from the New Testament itself, that however splendid and noble he was as a man, he could not have been the Almighty God, creator and preserver of the universe. Nothing that I can say will detract from his great human excellence. His nobleness, and purity, and lofty self-sacrifice for the truth, have never been surpassed. But, for all that, he was a man like ourselves; and even in a narrative purposely designed to represent him as faultless, he discloses certain sure signs of human error and infirmity which can never be reconciled with the idea that he was the Almighty God on earth.

(1). His knowledge was defective.—In Luke ii. 52, we read that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." The wisdom of God must be absolute and complete, and therefore not capable of increasing at all. If Jesus increased in wisdom, then he must at one time have been deficient in wisdom, and could not have been God himself. But it is further stated that he increased in favour with God. What can be more absurd than to say that God increased in his own favour? This text is perfectly consistent with the idea that Jesus was only a man, but utterly inconsistent with the idea that he was a God.

Then he believed that blindness and dumbness were the result of being possessed by a devil (Matt. xii. 22—28).—"Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb, and He healed Him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw .... When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." And Jesus answered, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?... But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come to you."

Another proof of his belief that devils were the immediate cause of disease is found in Matt. xvii. 14—21. A poor lunatic lad, subject to epilepsy, falling oftentimes into the fire and into the water, could not be healed by the disciples of Jesus, who thereupon reproaches them for their want of faith, and says, "Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him." He adds, in the 21st verse, "Howbeit this kind [of devil] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

His knowledge of Jewish history was at fault when he accused his countrymen of having murdered Zacharias, the son of Barachias (Matt. xxiii. 35). It was Zachariah, son of Jehoiada, who was slain, as described, between the temple and the altar. You will find this recorded in 2 Chron. xxiv. 20—22. Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was one of the prophetic writers of the Old Testament, and lived 320 years later. A very trifling mistake truly, but one

which makes all the difference to the claims made for Jesus that he was a god.

With respect to his future return to earth, he himself admits (Matt. xxiv. 36) that "of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only." Mark xiii. 32 says that Jesus said still more explicitly, "No man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." That he spoke the truth when he confessed this ignorance is too well established by those passages in which he predicted his return "before that generation should pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 29—35). "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. . . . Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." If words have any meaning at all, these words show that Jesus was mistaken in his prediction. I know a common method of trying to get out of this tiresome fact is to say that the "generation" spoken of did not

mean generation, but the present epoch or age of the world between Christ's ascension and his return to earth. But this involves the error of the apostles and the early Church, who all firmly believed that Christ would come again in the lifetime of some of them, and who accepted his words literally. (See 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.) I think myself that the immediate followers of Jesus were more likely to have known what he meant than we are. The later epistles show signs of the disappointment of this expectation (see 2 Peter iii. 4. and 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3).* And it is worthy of notice that the Fourth gospel, which many critics believe to have been written A.D. 160—180, carefully excludes all these predictions of Christ's second coming, and has a most suspicious looking passage in chap. xxi. 20—23: "Then Peter, turning about, seeth (John), . . . and saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? . . . Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die, but If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

When this book was written there can be little doubt that every one of the apostles and contemporaries of Jesus was dead and buried, and John, who perhaps survived them all, had been dead half-a-century.

* The genuineness of these two epistles is doubted by some critics.

That saying of Jesus concerning Judas Iscariot, always seemed to me inconsistent with the idea that Jesus was his Creator. "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born!" (Mark xiv. 21.) The Creator is surely responsible for the existence of all his creatures, and such a speech is unbecoming on the lips of the Creator.

Had Jesus been the Almighty God, neither could he have uttered those words on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As a cry of anguish and disappointment it was natural enough on the lips of frail man; but if Jesus were God himself, those words could have no meaning, or be but a solemn mockery.

In the fourth gospel we have presented to us a character in Jesus Christ in striking and painful contrast to the Jesus of the first three gospels. In the Synoptics, he is at least simple and plain, willing to teach, and to reply to enquirers, and free from narrowness in his religious views. But in the fourth gospel we find him represented as often striving to perplex and confound his questioners. He is in a state of chronic antagonism with the men around him who are not his own followers, and begins his ministry by condemnation of all who do not believe on Him. Chap. iii. 18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

He teaches the doctrine of Election notwithstand-

ing; chap. vi. 44, he says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Chap. ix. 39, "For judgment am I come into this world that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."

Is this God loving the world impartially, or is it not? In chap. xvii. 9, speaking of those who believe on him, he says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world." In chap. xi. 41, 42, he is represented at the grave of Lazarus, as saying, "Father I thank thee that thou hast heard me," and as saying this only for effect, "but because of the people which stand by I said it." God would surely have known his motives in saying "I thank thee that thou hast heard me," without Jesus telling him so; and to announce the motive to the bystanders was to give an air of insincerity and artifice to his own conduct. I cannot believe this of Jesus. This alone stamps the narrative as incredible and fictitious.

According to this untrustworthy gospel he taught not the doctrine of the Trinity, but rank Tritheism. Chap. xvi. 7, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Chap. xiv. 26, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name." According to this, one God is said to be unwilling or unable to be where another God is, but will take his place when he departs. These passages do not teach any doctrine of a Trinity, but only of Three

Gods in the most unconquerable plainness. Moreover they directly contradict the statement that "Jesus [himself was] full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke iv. 1), and that John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth (Luke i.) and his father Zecharias, and the aged Simeon were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and that the Holy Ghost (Matt. iii.) visibly descended upon Jesus at his baptism.

I see traces of human weakness in the language which Jesus is reported to have used against the chief priests and scribes and pharisees of his time. I know what it is to be tempted to abuse and denounce fiercely the men whom in our day we believe to be hindering the work of God, and keeping back from the people the light of truth. But what holds me from giving free utterance to my angry thoughts? Why, instead of abusing the men themselves, do I force myself into attacking only their erroneous or mischievous opinions? It is my conscience. My moral sense tells me that I must not call ill-names, nor let my righteous indignation against falsehood and blasphemy get the better of me, and lead me into malediction.

My reason also tells me that men are scarcely ever responsible for their beliefs or misbeliefs; that they deserve pity if they are in error, and do not deserve curses. Hence I could not, without a guilty conscience, take up the language of Jesus against the bigots of our own day. I could not say to any men, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John viii. 44); nor this, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how

can ye escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. xxiii. 33). I cannot be sure that he ever used such improper language as this to his fellow men, but I am very sure that the Gospels say that he did, and therefore the Gospels represent him as giving way to bad temper, and doing that which all decent people now-a-days agree in condemning as not only wrong, but futile; for abuse is not argument.

The last point in the recorded character of Jesus which I shall criticise is that which I shall deliberately call his disregard of family ties.

Luke ii. 43, tells us that "the child Jesus [being twelve years old,] tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." After three days they found him in the temple, and his mother said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Ver. 49. And he said unto them, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them." (Notwithstanding all that is written about the miraculous birth.) "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." Ver. 51. (Notwithstanding his Father's business, which he at once gave up.)

Now what chills my heart in this story is not that a little boy of twelve years old should be so thoughtlessly cruel as to get away unknown to his parents; but that when he was told of their sorrow in losing him, he made no sort of apology—never uttered a word

of tender regret, but only began to vindicate himself on the ground of a higher obligation; as though God in heaven ever did or ever would desire a child to inflict such a wound as that on its parents' hearts.

I know what it is to lose a child for a few hours. I have helped more than one poor mother to find her lost little one in the dense streets of London, and I have felt and witnessed the agony of parental anguish, worse while it lasts than the wrench of death. And yet this youth of twelve, said also to be God Almighty, could inflict such a wound as this and not know it; and when tenderly reminded of it, neither felt nor expressed the least sorrow. This disregard of natural ties is again exhibited, Matt. xii. 46—50, "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him." Then a bystander tells him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." But instead of regarding the fifth commandment, which says, Honour thy father and thy mother, he answered and said unto him that told him, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!"

I can hardly read such passages with patience. They exhibit Jesus as completely destitute of natural affection, cruel and disrespectful towards his mother, and carried away by egotistical vanity. Mark iii. 31—35, tells the same tale, and Luke viii. 20—21, likewise, with this variation, "My mother

and my brethren are those which hear the Word of God, and keep it." What about the fifth commandment being the Word of God?

The fourth Gospel has furnished two instances in which Jesus is described—and in my opinion, falsely described,—as guilty of a coldness towards his mother, which is unpardonable and unworthy of a man. Chapter ii. gives an account of the marriage at Cana in Galilee. Verse 3, "When they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus said unto him, They have no wine." Instead of saying tenderly, Leave it to me, dear mother, he says, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

Those who are ignorant of Greek must not suppose there was anything disrespectful in the term "Woman;" it was equivalent to Lady or Madam. But the cutting coldness of this reply betrays the absence of natural affection, which, as a son and a father, I here openly denounce as a frightful blemish in the life and character of Jesus Christ.

Worse than all, when that neglected mother, who had followed him about with so much maternal pride, treasuring up every word of his in her loving heart, comes and stands by the Cross, to be at hand in his last hour, to render a kindly service, or to get a loving farewell from those lips which she had idolised more than they deserved to be, what is his greeting? He points to a disciple standing near, and says (John xix. 25—27), "Woman, behold thy son;" and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother." Even supposing him to have been thus providing for her

future support, yet anything more heartless than this you cannot conceive—it betrays a soul in which all natural affection is dead, or in which it never even had birth. There was not a word of love in it, not a word of tenderness. The sword that was to go through that poor mother's soul pierced her to her agony.* I for one would say if this anguish of heart could not have been avoided because Jesus was God, then it was a thousand pities that he became incarnate at all. No benefit to mankind could compensate for the mischief of such a cruel example—for this persistent and heartless trampling on the purest affections of humanity.

If you, my Bibliolator, insist upon this being a proof that Jesus was Divine, and therefore superior to all family and local ties, then, in God's name, I say yours is a God whom I will not follow nor believe in; whose every word I will disobey, and whose every guidance I will distrust.

I will now place you on the horns of a dilemma. If Jesus treated his mother and his brethren as described in the Gospels, then he was not the God who commands us to honour our father and mother, and to love each other as brethren. If Jesus did not do so, then your Gospels speak falsely, and are no longer to be trusted, when they tell you that Jesus lived before Abraham, or was born without a human father.

My painful task is done. Had I known beforehand what a mass of evidence there was to close

* Luke ii. 35.

from, I would not have attempted to treat this great subject in one Lecture. As it is, I have left an enormous quantity of illustrations for future use. When the popular superstition is destroyed, it will then be my privilege and happiness to speak of the truths and beauties of the Bible and of the character of Jesus, with the genuine enthusiasm which I feel.

I believe I am not saying more than the literal truth when I affirm that I have to-night completely proved that the Bible contains errors, and immoral teaching, and views degrading to God, and that the very records of the life of Jesus furnish their own testimony that he was only a man, and was not free from some human imperfections and infirmities.

It would be well for all those who clamour for the infallibility of the Bible, or for the Godhead of Jesus Christ, to be careful not to omit one very important preliminary before they venture upon arguing out their views—the advice I give gratis and with a hearty welcome—

"READ YOUR BIBLES."

FAREWELL ADDRESS

TO THE PARISHIONERS OF HEALAUGH

ON THE 30TH OF JULY, 1871.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I hope I have not reckoned too rashly on your sympathy and affection, in asking you here to-night to listen to a few last words from me before I leave you.

In the midst of my overwhelming duties and pressing cares it was impossible for me to prepare anything like an elaborate address. I would have preferred talking to you in a more homely manner, but in place of that, I have written down in a very loose and disconnected form, a few thoughts which I desire to impress upon your minds at this somewhat solemn hour of our parting.

It is now two years since I last preached to you from the pulpit in Healaugh Church, but I cannot believe that the general impression which my sermons had made upon a most regular and attentive congregation, can have already passed away. You will all of you remember three great principles which formed the basis of all my teaching, and which I am sure you will excuse me for now repeating as briefly and forcibly as I can.

First, I have ever insisted upon your own right to think for yourselves. I have done more, I have urged it upon you as your most solemn duty to your Maker, to form your own religious belief, as far as possible, without the interference or authority of any mortal man.

In doing this I have not only delivered my own soul from the responsibility of leading or misleading others; but I have, as I think, best discharged my duty to God as His minister and messenger. If there is one thing more than another that ought always to set you on your guard against a teacher of religion, it is when he comes to you with the assertion of his own spiritual authority, and either bribes you with promises of eternal happiness, or threatens you with the penalties of eternal misery in order to persuade you to think as *he* does. No man has a right to be listened to for a moment who dares to set himself up as the spokesman of God, as having the right to dictate to you what you shall or shall not believe. If any minister, or any church, or any book should presume to make this arrogant claim over your minds and consciences, you are bound to reject it as men. Your loyalty to God in heaven, and your fealty to His voice in your consciences, command you to resist and to reject the insolent usurper of the divine throne in your hearts. Tell him you will listen to him, and hear what he has to say, so long as he speaks to you in his own name and out of his own heart's honest convictions; but if he dare to say, "Obey me, or you are lost:"

if he dare to say or insinuate that he has a grain of authority over you in matters of faith and religion, then you will *know* that God has not sent him, that he is one of those false prophets who "use their own tongues, and say The Lord saith," and that he is to be henceforth an object of just suspicion, and every word he speaks is to be received with distrust.

The whole system of religion, as it has been for so long taught in our country, tended to make men lean on the guidance of their priests and ministers, instead of learning religion and faith from God Himself. They have begun from earliest years to be trained up in mortal terror for their soul's salvation. "Believe this, and thou shalt be saved; disbelieve it, and thou shalt be damned," are the bugbears which have made men run to the minister of religion for advice, just as we run to the doctor in times of dangerous sickness. We have grown up to take our religion at second-hand, and to trust to the word of mortal man instead of listening to the eternal word of God in our own souls. Thus, persons who are either too lazy to take the trouble of thinking for themselves, or too timid to walk alone, and too unbelieving to trust themselves alone with God, seize upon the nearest support they can find, grasp the hand of the boldest man who promises them security, and force themselves in blind alarm to accept doctrines and opinions which they would not have looked at without horror had they been left to themselves, and not been frightened out of their wits.

But I urge upon you this perfect independence of thought in religion on higher ground still. If you want your religion to do you good—to elevate your character and conduct, and to be worth living, suffering and dying for, you must make it for yourselves—you must find it out letter by letter, word by word out of God's own lesson book of life and experience. Out of your own devotion to duty, your own reverence for truth in word and deed, your own neighbourliness and friendliness with others around you, your own real love and generosity of heart towards enemies, out of your own joys and sorrows, hopes, and fears,—out of all these things, if you pray to God to teach you, you will learn—not once for all—but every day and hour more and more of what God is, and of His great and loving purposes with yourselves and all mankind. I have myself found by observation that this can be done. No one now need say that the task of forming his own religious belief is too great for him. You have just the same sources of religious faith and knowledge that your ministers have. Their Greek and Latin and acquaintance with texts and doctrines have no more to do with their real knowledge of God, if they have any, than with their morality as men. They have no resources for the acquirement of this knowledge which you do not possess likewise. They have reason and common sense; so have you. They have consciences; so have you. They have hearts; so have you. And God is as near to you as to them. Their standing at the altar or ministering to you

officially in pulpit or desk, gives them not the very smallest advantage which you do not also enjoy in your pews, or in your own homes. Once more then, my dear friends, I say to you, *think for yourselves*, and take away with you this beautiful passage from John Wesley's writings:—"We leave every man to enjoy his own opinion and to use his own mode of worship, desiring only that the love of God and his neighbour be the ruling principle in his heart, and show itself in his life by an uniform practice of justice, mercy, and truth. And accordingly we give the right hand of fellowship to every lover of God and man, whatever his opinion or mode of worship may be, of which he is to give an account to God only."

The second of the three great points in my teaching, you will remember is, that whether my opinions be right or wrong, I have always endeavoured to make God appear so much better in every way than the older views did. Almost every sermon, every attack made upon popular beliefs, every declaration of my own belief, began, continued, and ended in this, that the dear God and Father of us all is infinitely better than men have generally imagined. If I have rejected a single statement in the Bible as untrue, it was because, and only because, in my opinion, it was unworthy of God. God is better than *that*, I said to myself, and therefore this is not His word, this cannot be true. If I have rejected any doctrine, such as the universal curse of God against Adam's race, and the restoration to God's favour by the atoning blood of Christ, I have rejected those doctrines only and

solely because in my opinion they degrade and dishonour God. My ideal of God is far nobler than those doctrines lead us to think Him; and therefore I cast them from me. Sometimes, I do not wonder at my being put out of the synagogue for hurting peoples' prejudices and contradicting the religious opinions of the chief priests and rulers; but at other times, when I remember that all my work has been to vindicate and magnify the exceeding goodness of God—to raise our conceptions of Him—to make men admire, and trust and love Him more, and to preach the Parable of the Prodigal Son over again, I am aghast at the folly and blindness of that opposition which has so long endeavoured to silence me, and which has ended in my being driven from this quiet happy home. I am filled with pain and shame to think that in the nineteenth century any man, however erroneous and mistaken he might be, can be actually disqualified for the duties of a clergyman by his very efforts to set forth a nobler idea of God and to "speak good of His Name."

But for myself, it certainly makes me happy and contented—the danger is that it may make me conceited also—to know that this is the real fact of the case, and that it is, after all, a very great honour to have suffered at all in such a noble cause. But some one may say, "Stop, that is not what you were deprived for. You were deprived for preaching contrary to the thirty-nine articles—not ostensibly for extolling the honour of God." True, my friend, not ostensibly, but really nevertheless. But just think

of this; I attacked some of the doctrines of the Church advisedly and confessedly on the ground that they dishonoured God, and only on that ground. You could not separate a single charge against me from this other charge.—"You, Charles Voysey, are hereby trying to vindicate God's honour against man's errors and falsehood," and the fact remains that my opponents cared more for the doctrines impugned than for God's honour. They cared more for the thirty-nine articles than for setting the character and dealings of God in a more favourable and inviting aspect. They only attacked me at all, in short, because they knew that their wretched doctrines would not stand a day if they had not. Those doctrines could not live by the side of the more beautiful views of God, which I have with all my weakness earnestly endeavoured to set forth. Just as the chief priests in all ages have set themselves against Jesus and all who, like him, have proclaimed a nobler God than that of popular belief, so in this case the custodians of orthodoxy have done their worst to myself, from a firm conviction that, if my views are true, then their own orthodoxy is false and must perish—that one or the other must give way. It was only to be expected that they should fight for what was most precious to them. The only sad part of it all is that their conduct to me shows that those orthodox doctrines of God's curse, endless torments, and atonement by bloodshed are more precious to them than the blessed gospel of a Father's love to the whole world.

Now remember, my dear friends, I confess I have attacked the Bible—parts of it—believing that they dishonour God. I have insisted that there is only *one* God, believing that the doctrine of the Trinity always leads men to a belief in three Gods, and that this belief is dishonouring to the one God, the Father Almighty. I have in various ways taught that Jesus was a righteous man, but not less man than we are, because it is dishonouring to God, and is repugnant to the teaching of Jesus to believe that Jesus was God also. I have also denied the doctrine of the atonement and everlasting hell, because it is dishonouring to God to believe him capable of requireing, or capable of accepting such atonement; and that it would be not only dishonouring, but blasphemous to God to say that He would be so unjust and cruel as to suffer any one to be born into the world for endless woe and sin. But—it is my boast—I have never felt a thought or breathed a word consciously dishonouring to God the Creator of the world, and the Father of men. To magnify His holy name, to speak of all His marvellous loving kindness, to exult in His utter trustworthiness as the father and friend of sinners, to rejoice in His wise and impartial judgments, in His fatherly chastisement of our faults, to hope in His boundless and unconditioned mercy to all mankind, and to love and adore Him for His own unutterable majesty of holiness,—this I have tried to do with all my heart—for this I have given up the early faith of my youth, have suffered the loss of many friends and much

worldly good, and have at length brought myself to a bitter exile from the church of my country and my forefathers. Great as I feel it sometimes, it is a small price, a contemptible price, to pay for so great an honour. Like the apostles in their first experience of persecution, I can truly say "I rejoice that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for my Father's name."

If I am wrong in my opinion, if there be a limit to God's great goodness which my enthusiasm has overstepped, if it be possible that a poor sinful worm like me can conceive of goodness actually greater than the real goodness of God—in plain English, If I have actually made God out to be better than He is—why then orthodoxy would be true after all, and God never made a greater blunder in the universe than when he created such a fool as I should then be! An idiot of a man who actually believed God to be a better being than His own creature!—This is really what it comes to if orthodoxy is true. If I am wrong in thinking God so good, and if orthodoxy is right in painting God uglier than unjust men, then this is the absurdity into which you are landed, that some of God's creatures are nobler, more righteous, more loving, more just than He is Himself! "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say." Can you wonder that I peer into the distant future with something more than a bounding hope that the creed of the coming age will be my creed, that men will not be so insane as to cherish orthodoxy, when it is fairly perceived to involve such

monstrous absurdities as this, and that they will be only too glad and thankful to believe all the good they possibly can of the Great Ruler of the world?

My third and last point is that I have done my best to show the connection between religion and morality. I have called the orthodox doctrines immoral, because they *do* tend in some cases to encourage sin, to speak peace to souls when there is no peace, to comfort the souls of some whom God does not wish to comfort, to make the souls of the righteous sad whom God does not wish to make sad. Sermons against good works I have heard by the score, and sermons which promise to really base and wicked men a sudden entrance into heavenly bliss, if they will only believe in the death of Christ. I have, on the contrary, endeavoured to cultivate good conduct and high principle as the best means—nay, the only sure means, as God's own appointed way—of finding out what the goodness of God is.

I have said that the path to true knowledge lies through a willing obedience. "If any man wishes to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." You know I have never said a word to make light of sin, never have I set forth the loving kindness of God as the smallest encouragement to do wickedly. I want *that* to be remembered and acted upon. We are all seeking after God, or intending some day to seek Him, when it is convenient, or when we have made enough money, or when we are older, or so forth. If we are so stupid as to put it off, still we cannot enter that path by

any other gate than that which God Himself has fixed at its beginning. Whenever we begin, we must begin by wishing and trying to be good. The older we are, the more inveterate our habits, and the stronger our prejudices, the harder it will be for us to begin the search after God, because it will be all the harder to unlearn our false lessons, to correct our errors, to leave off our bad habits, and to give up our base desires. Again and again let me say to you, man cannot know what goodness is except in so far as he is good himself, or desiring earnestly and striving to be good. You may have Decalogues, and Bibles, and Sermons on the Mount, and Catechisms, and all that is really true and beautiful in precept, but learning them all by rote, and being able to repeat them like a parrot is not the same thing as knowing what goodness and righteousness are. If God is love, you can only understand that and know it by being loving yourself, and trying to love others more and more.

You see this is something like turning the world upside down. Heretofore it has been taught, "You shall become good and happy by believing certain doctrines." Now we teach, "You must be good first or on the road to it before you can even know what doctrines are true;" You can't learn the A B C of heaven and God until you have learned the language of a good child, "Father, Thy will be done."

Pardon me, my dear friends, you have often and often stood up for me in your homes, your fields,

and your markets. Take away with you these three things, and let the world, and posterity after you, know that Charles Voysey told men to think for themselves; and tried his best to be a preacher of righteousness—of homely work and common duty, and brotherly love; and that he was turned out of his living because he *would* teach that God was at least as good as the best of men, and infinitely better still, while orthodoxy said He was not.

In my long contest, I have received from many of you much support, sympathy, and encouragement. I own with grateful pleasure the regular attendance on the services of the Church, and your patient—even indulgent—attention to what I had to say. It is very creditable to this parish that even those who differed from me deeply have for the most part willingly listened to, and no doubt carefully reflected on, the startling opinions which I felt it my duty to set forth. But I look back now with the sincerest pleasure and gratification to the delightful friendship and confidence which have subsisted between you and me as neighbours all these years of my residence among you. Your kind attentions I shall ever cherish in my memory as marks of esteem and regard, which I wish I had better deserved. And it is not by any means the smallest part of my punishment for being true to my convictions, to have to leave behind me, perhaps never to meet again on earth, friends who have treated me like father and mother, brothers and sisters. There is one whom I cannot prevent myself from mentioning, and whose

life and deeds, whose struggles, disappointments, and perseverance in the path of duty, under the greatest discouragements, will never be adequately known in this world. You owe to him any possible benefit or service which I may have been to you. The patron of this living has been, under the loving providence of God, father and mother to me and mine. The world shall not know till he is safe out of reach of bigotry and reproach, how much it owes to his intelligent mind and generous heart. I only say, it will be a very sad day for us, and an evil day for Healaugh, when he is carried to his grave. Make the most of him while he is with you. Let him never have cause to feel that all his work here for God's honour, and for the liberation of souls from the tyranny of dogmas has been thrown away upon you. You have not yet made any public stand, you have not exposed yourselves to the smallest danger for the sake of your religious convictions. I do not reproach you for this. I have myself held you back from such exposure. I only say, as I said years ago to you from the pulpit, "The time may come when you will have to take a side, when you will be called upon to make a choice between your own worldly interests and your heartfelt convictions." Oh! for God's sake, learn to be men, learn to be brave; learn, moreover, to trust in God, and to leave him to fight your battle for you and to provide for all your need, as He has for mine, in the day of persecution. Everything I now enjoy came to me unexpectedly, and most certainly unsought. I am better off to-

day, in this hour of my banishment, than when I came to you, nearly eight years ago. I am going up to the great city to sink or swim in the great ocean of conflicting interests. I have not before me the certainty of earning £5 a-year! I have even chosen this tremendous hazard with freedom, in preference to a fine income and easy work with bonds. But somehow I am rather glad than otherwise to be going out into the world once more, leaning on God instead of on man. The longer I have lived to try God the better do I trust Him, and, above all, the more resigned I feel to His blessed will. When I talk of God's mercy and faithfulness, I am not giving you second-hand information, or only canting out texts. I am telling you what I have known of Him by experience, quite as surely as what I know of my best friends on earth. Religion is not worth having that is not the result of such actual experience. But then if you do not try God, how can you find out what he is? If you do not act so as to prove your entire dependence upon Him, how can you test His trustworthiness at all?

I cannot leave you, my dear friends, without some notice of the ungenerous attacks made upon me for having clung to my position in the Church of England until driven out of it by law.

On my honour I can assure you, in the first place, that I was uncertain all along whether the law would go against me or not. There was some hope that a similar judgment as that in the case of "*Essays and Reviews*" would be given in my own case—a hope

largely supported by the recent Act of Parliament on the Subscription of the clergy.

Had I succeeded in further widening the liberties of the clergy, nothing but acclamations of applause would have followed, but my failure has, as usual, been turned into a weapon of reproach.

Some have foolishly supposed that I held on to the Church for the loaves and fishes, not knowing that the first seven years of my clerical life were devoted to the Church for nothing, and that out of the remaining twelve years I never had, except for one year in Jamaica, an income from the Church, of more than a pitiful £100 or £120 a-year— scarcely a third of what I needed for bread for my family; and that I refused offers of chapels with an income four times as large as this living. Others, again, have said that I held on to the Church for the advantages of the social position of a clergyman. I beg to remind them that the position of a clergyman added nothing at all to the social rank which I occupied before I took Orders, and which I now carry away with me, and which I shall continue to retain.

My sole object was to liberate the clergy, and to break their bonds. All history testifies that reforms must come from within, and are next to impossible when attempted from without. The most solemn of all my obligations was not that of agreement with the Thirty-nine Articles (which everyone knows are contradictory to each other, and to parts of the Prayer Book), but it was when I promised by God's

grace "to instruct the people committed to my charge out of the Holy Scriptures, and to teach *nothing*, as required of necessity for eternal salvation, *but that which I myself was persuaded could be concluded and proved by the Scripture.*" I am not careful to answer my accusers in this matter. I leave God to answer for me whether or not I have done my best to fulfil this my most sacred vow and pledge.

Any one among all the 15,000 clergy of this Church of ours could be likewise condemned and deprived if the machinery of the law were to be set in motion against him, and he were to be tried without prejudice and without favour. If not, how comes it that the most opposite opinions and doctrines are still taught in our pulpits? If one set be in accordance with the law, the opposite set cannot be. As Dean Stanley says:—"We should all have to go out, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the humblest curate in the wilds of Cumberland."

My last words to you would be sadly incomplete if I omitted to say what I hope in most cases it will be unnecessary to say about the Archbishop of York. I know how affection colours the view we take of other people's conduct, and if you feel that my going away is any loss to you, it might make you angry and indignant against those who have contrived to separate us. Now, I sincerely believe that few people in the world are more sorry for my deprivation than the Archbishop himself. On every ground he must be aware what a mischief has really been done to the cause of religion, as well as to the

reputation of the Church of England, by my condemnation. He is, moreover, a kind-hearted man, and is truly sorry for my misfortunes. He has children of his own, which always humanizes a man, and you may be sure that he cannot contemplate the distressing uncertainty of my pecuniary position without sympathy and regret. All I ask of you is to keep a soft corner in your hearts, and a kind word on your tongues, for one who, after great hesitation, undertook what he felt to be his duty, and a most disagreeable duty too.

It is not every Bishop or Archbishop that could keep at bay such a crowd of angry bigots as that which surrounded and pressed him on to this ill-advised course. We must not be too hard on those whose public functions lead them to ignore, and almost to lose, their own identity under popular clamour.

I, of course, think that if the Archbishop had been able to endure the taunts and reproaches of his clergy, he would have done far better for the Church, and perhaps for his own conviction of what was best. But his Grace having yielded under so much pressure, do not let us sit in judgment upon his conduct, or add to his own distress by the imputation of unworthy motives.

I will say but little more about myself. I only ask you for your affectionate regard and sympathy in the path of duty which may lie before me. I shall be once more thrown amongst strangers, and shall miss sadly and sorrowfully many and many a dear

face on which my eyes now rest with loving gratitude. There are many among you whose hearts I have wooed and won; there are still more who have sought and won my love and admiration in return. How I wish I could have done more than I have done for you all, and that I could help you still, if ever so little! But as God in his wisdom thinks fit to separate us, I hope and pray that your new vicar, whoever he may be, will endeavour, whatever be his views on theology, to make your burdens lighter, and your path easier, than I have ever been able to do. I hope that you will learn to love him, and to help him, and to teach him, as many of you have loved, and helped, and taught me; and that when his turn comes to say farewell, he may leave you, as I now do, with grateful affection and a bursting heart.

I leave behind me a very precious memorial. For my sake, take care of my mother's grave. Let her her name remind you, as you enter your church, of what little truth I have been able to proclaim—of those lessons in love and duty which, in spite of my heresies, I have so earnestly tried to enforce, and, above all, of that eternal life for which I have helped you to hope. A son's love will bring me to her grave, not once only, I hope, before I die; and ties yet stronger than these, which bind me to the living, will surely draw me hither again whenever it be possible to revisit this dear and happy home, and greet once more the friends from whom it is so distressing to part. Till we meet again I commend you to the care and guidance of a loving Father,

whose watchful eye will be over us all, and whose loving hand we can all peacefully and securely grasp, led by Him into all duty, and then, in His own good time, into all truth. With such eternal sunshine in our hearts we need never weep.

Farewell! God bless you!

INAUGURAL DISCOURSE

AT

ST. GEORGE'S HALL,

ON SUNDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 1871.

"*Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.*"

GALATIANS vi. 9.

I HAVE chosen this text as a motto on this very interesting occasion of our assembling here to-day, rather than as a special subject of our meditation.

It would be unnecessary, and even unprofitable, to occupy our thoughts with an essay on the duty of perseverance, or with a string of common-places about success being the reward of patient and well-sustained exertion. We are too much men of the world not to know by experience that if we wish to succeed in our present undertaking, we must bring to bear upon it our best and wisest thought, our undaunted courage under apparent failure, and our most patient and self-denying exertions.

It seems more fitting to the circumstances of the hour that we should begin our work with a brief and comprehensive review of what we have undertaken

to do, so as to get, if possible, in plain words, a definite statement of the objects which have drawn, and are still drawing together from all parts of the world so important an organization as that which we profess to represent.

Our first work—that indeed which has been the key note of this organization — is to undermine, assail, and, if possible, to destroy that part of the prevailing religious belief which we deem to be false.

We make no secret of our antagonism. We frankly state our denials, and are ready to give our reasons for the denial of any doctrine which we denounce. We are in open warfare against much of what goes by the name of Christianity. We repudiate at the outset the tacit or avowed assumptions which are almost universally accepted as the basis of religious belief.

To be more explicit, we deny the doctrines of the fall of man from original righteousness; of the curse of God against our race, and of his supposed sentence of any of his creatures to everlasting woe; therefore we deny not merely the doctrine of the atonement, but the necessity for any method whatever of appeasing the imaginary wrath of God. For every one of these doctrines involves a flaw in the moral perfection of God, and violates our instinctive perception of His goodness. The fall of man, *e.g.*, involves an admission that God was either unable or unwilling to keep His creature as good as He had at first made him; and that, contrary to the conclusions of science, God's work is not progressive—that the

first man was a paragon of perfection, instead of being in the lowest rank of savages. The doctrine of God's curse against our race in consequence of the first man's sin involves a still greater blemish on the moral perfection of God; it is contrary to all sense of justice that one man should be an object of wrath in consequence of another man's sin, much more that a whole world of countless millions should be deemed accursed and sentenced to everlasting perdition through the sole faults of their first parents. This doctrine we discard, because it is morally degrading to God. For the same reason, only with immeasurably greater indignation, we reject the doctrine that God withdrew the curse and sentence from the heads of a few of our race in consequence of the death of Jesus, by which, orthodoxy tells us, the Father was reconciled to men. The remedy was worse than the disease. The compromise more dishonourable than the injustice which it was intended to amend. These are only a few, but they are the most prominent of the doctrines which nearly all so-called Christians deem to be essential; and our first work, I say, is to hasten their coming downfall, to rid the world of ideas which, though once they were good and useful in comparison with the ideas which they supplanted, have now become both poisonous and loathsome—full of injury to the human heart and mind, and blasphemous in the ears of the most High.

Gathering round these abjured doctrines are others of only less noxious character, such as the belief in

a Devil, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Godhead, and even the superhuman Divinity of Jesus Christ, the expectation of His return to earth as the Judge and King of men, the doctrine of the Church as a spiritual and authoritative power, the doctrines of sacraments, of holy orders, of priestly interference and control in every shape, and of the necessity for priestly intervention at the burial of the dead. All these topics are suggestive of many protests, which it will be our duty to make.

There is one, however, which I have not yet mentioned, reserving it for a paragraph by itself. We shall be met at the onset of our attack by the warning, that we have no right to form about any of God's dealings an opinion which may be contrary to the revealed religion contained in the Bible, or in the Church, or in both. This is where the conflict will be hottest. We must bring all our forces to bear against this insidious and plausible plea. We shall have not merely to defend our own right to use the Light of Nature within us, but to show up the weak points in our enemies' armour—to challenge them to a defence of those glaring immoralities and absurdities in the Bible, or in the "revealed" religion, which none of them as yet have had the courage to defend—to exhibit also unsparingly the numberless fallacies which abound in their theories of a Church, and to make them show cause why any claimant for our obedience should be accepted more than his rivals. We must repeat and repeat the fact, that so-called revelations abound in

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all the earth, each one being believed by its adherents to be the only true one; and that Christendom itself is divided piecemeal into separate and antagonistic Churches, each of which in turn is, of course, the only true Church.

To the world outside, who may watch the struggle, we may appeal with confidence, knowing that all the Churches, all the Priests, all the Bibles, and all the Catechisms, have never yet been able to quench the spark of Divine justice, and love of truth, which the Almighty God has kindled in the human breast. The time will come when, if our orthodox opponents shall have succeeded in proving that the Bible or the Church teach authoritatively doctrines against which the mind and heart and conscience of men rebel, men will make answer—"So much the worse for the Church—so much the worse for the Bible;" and what is bad in both will be cast away to the moles and to the bats—to the dust and darkness appointed for all falsehood.

To pave the way for even this preliminary work of necessary destruction, we must first of all persuade the timorous to enter upon the work of religious enquiry without any dread of being punished for honest conviction. The Churches hold all their power at this moment through the superstitious fears of men and women. From first to last the cry is, "Flee from the wrath to come," "Believe this, and thou shalt be saved;" and as nothing is so catching as fear, the multitude run hither and thither, to seek shelter from impending doom.

A great part of our work, then, must be to proclaim the perfect safety of the path of enquiry; to tell men and women that even if they go wrong in opinion, even if they miss much precious truth and embrace much mischievous error, the Lord of all will not damn them for it for ever. The Father's love will not shrivel up or grow cold because, in our blindness or twilight, we have missed the path of truth, or made but slow progress therein. We must teach them that, wrong or right, they are equally safe from the absurd horrors which have hitherto scared them; and that all the ill-consequences of error which Divine goodness has ordained, are only ordained to teach us to correct our mistakes, and to improve our method of search after His truth. I sometimes fear that—as regards this country at all events—most of us will not live to see the false doctrines of Christianity utterly rooted out, but we may well hope to have set free our countrymen in a few short years from this insane and ridiculous fear of damnation as the penalty for error in opinion. We can do nothing with the religious masses till we have set them free to think without trembling at every step. Let us do this with all our might, and let us not be weary in this piece of well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

But our work does not rest here. I believe I am only echoing the thoughts of every heart which has sympathised with us, when I say we should be both distressed and ashamed if all our work were only destructive, if all our energies were to be exhausted

in pulling down even false belief and only in undermining erroneous doctrine. So far from that, we only pull down that we may build up, we only desire to eradicate false beliefs that we may be able to plant true beliefs in their place. Though I am only an insignificant unit in the great brotherhood of free-thinkers and enemies of orthodoxy, I may point with an honest pride to those published works for which I have been expelled from my benefice, and ask, Are not those writings full of positive beliefs? Can you find a sermon amongst them all which does not proclaim as much my anxiety that we should believe and teach what is true, as that we should give up and denounce what is false? Had this not been so, I should certainly not deserve to stand here to-day as the mouthpiece of so many earnest and devout men. But we must be prepared for every form of reproach and every degree of misrepresentation. When people can deliberately say of a man, "He is only a Theist," assuming that, in their own minds, and in that of their hearers, contempt need go no further, it proves that they know nothing whatever of Theism, and that they have never taken the pains even to ascertain what we really believe, or why we believe it; still less why we should have willingly suffered for it.

It will be our chief duty and our highest delight to proclaim our real convictions, to contrast our own faith with the faith we have so gladly abandoned, and to try to teach those who may be halting between two opinions, and others who may have

no faith at all, to embrace the views which our own hearts, as God made them, have taught us to approve.

It will delight us to tell how we have learnt to call God our Father; to trust Him unseen; to look to Him for guidance in difficulty, and for strength in duty; to feel that He is about our path and about our bed, near to us at every moment of our lives, ready to give all the light and knowledge which our narrow souls can receive, to console us under every disappointment and sorrow, and to give us hope when everything else is gone. It will be our joy to show that this faith in our Father is the natural outcome of the possession and exercise of loving virtues; that—if there be a God at all—He must for ever be above, and never below, the moral beauty of the best of His creatures; that as we grow in friendliness, and brotherliness, and fatherliness to our fellow-men, we learn more and more of the exceeding and unspeakable love of God; that we give to Him the best name we know to-day, ready to exchange it for a better and truer one on the morrow, if human life and its relations rise higher still.

Contrasting this with the miserable narrow estimate of God's love as given us in Christianity, we gladly proclaim that *all that God is to ourselves, He is also that to every one of our fellow-men.* He has no favourites, and the best and happiest one amongst us all, in this world or in the world to come, is only the type of what every other soul shall be when his turn come. Meeting the objection against His love,

drawn from the sufferings and moral degradation of many of our race, we can either explain it by thoughtful reference to pains and sins we have ourselves once experienced, and found them to be pregnant with eternal blessing, or we take refuge in the thought that our goodness—small as it is—would not allow us to inflict one grain of pain or shame without a purpose of lasting good, nor to withhold any amount of painful discipline that was necessary to secure the ultimate happiness and virtue of the individual exposed to it; and then we ask ourselves, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall the creature be more loving than the Creator?"

We shall have to confront those who believe too little as well as those who believe too much. We know that if an unspoken Atheism be rife in this land, it must be laid at the door of those who painted man worse than a worm, and God blacker than a fiend.

The creed of Christendom is the cradle—nay, the mother of Atheism; and the Churches may thank themselves for degrading not only the name and work of Jesus—one of the world's best men—but also the principles of mankind and the honour of God. If we would do any successful work amongst those who are exiles from the regions of faith, we must come to them to learn, not to teach; to learn every bit of truth and duty which they have valued, while, perhaps, we have under-valued it. We must come to them, honouring them for their protest against a foul caricature of the Most High and His dealings, and

only desiring to impart to them what is so precious to ourselves by the legitimate process of argument, and the still more efficient agency of a well-ordered example. If they make their just boast that they are all for mankind—to raise their kindred and their race, to un-loose the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke—let us meet them, at all events, on their own ground as brothers of humanity, and as setting the highest possible value on services rendered to man as the only true service acceptable to God.

Amongst the beliefs which it will be our duty to proclaim, stands next in order our hope for the life to come. We do not dogmatise on this or on any other point, but it will devolve upon us to multiply and strengthen all the evidences on which our hopes are based. We all feel that our future life is bound up in the very existence of God; the two must stand or fall together; and while we are careful never to allow our hopes and longings for immortal bliss to clog our footsteps in the path of duty upon earth; while we are most scrupulous to avoid turning it into a bribe for the performance of duties which are their own reward, we should do all in our power to deepen the roots of our belief in the world to come, as our only solace under the bitter pangs of bereavement, and as a wholesome stimulus to our efforts after holiness, which can never be adequately satisfied in the world below.

To all this, which we may call our public work, we must add the far more important business of

cultivating in our lives the spirit of truth, integrity, purity, and brotherly love. In our own homes, and in the pursuit of our daily toil, we must find the great field of self-culture and discipline, without which all our public exertions in the service of truth and liberty will be thrown away. If we find our honour growing more sensitive, our thoughts more elevated, our speech more refined and exact, our tempers more placid and enduring, our consciences more tender, and our affections more wide and deep, we shall find, also, that our public and social influence for good will grow at the same time, and men will learn to love us in spite of our creed, and will pardon us for spurning their own. And above all, if, in our desire to know more of God, and to be convinced of His goodness, where we only doubted before, we seem only to become more confused, more bewildered by the strife of tongues, our only chance of rest, and peace, and joy in believing, will be found in our own efforts to be good and to do good. There is no other avenue to the Throne of God's majesty on high; no other means of rending the veil which hides the glory of His love, but what is to be found in the goodness of each man's own heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they only shall see God."

Time would fail me were I to attempt to enumerate the many collateral duties which will belong to us as an association. We must only resolve to meet them as they arise, in the same sincerity, and with the same activity, as that in which we desire to regulate our lives.

Of the service in which we have all united to-day, it becomes me not to speak but in terms of humility and hope. It has been prepared in distressing haste. At best it is only an experiment, and time alone will enable us to test its value and to correct its faults. I only ask you—and that with perfect confidence—for your patient trial of it.

One word more upon my text and I have done. "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

For my own part, I have taken up my share in this great work without any sanguine expectation of my own success. But I mean to work at it body and soul, day and night, if need be, in spite of any amount of opposition and discouragement. I do not mean to let it go till I am beaten off it, as it were, lifeless. As long as I have a voice left me, it shall be raised to magnify the loving kindness of the Lord, and to speak good of His name. No terror shall shut my lips—no bribes shall tamper with the utterance of my heart's thoughts. So help me God! But in saying this for myself, I know I am speaking for the thousands who have hitherto supported me, and for those who are gathered here to-day. If we fight shoulder to shoulder, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, we shall in time disarm all opposition, win over to our ranks the wavering and fashion-fearing multitude, and plant our banner of truth, and liberty, and love, where no foe can reach it. Thank God, the cause to which we have pledged ourselves is not our cause only, but His—does not

depend on my life or fidelity, or feeble powers—no, nor on all of us put together; it must prevail in the end, conquering every obstacle, and rising over every wave of seeming failure, because it is devoted, first to God's truth, then to God's honour, and last, but not least, to the true welfare of man. "Our help standeth in the name of the Lord who hath made heaven and earth!"

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL,
ON SUNDAY, 29TH OCTOBER, 1871.

"*What think ye of Christ.*"

MATTHEW xxii. 42.

I HAVE been specially requested to make this question the subject of one or more discourses; and although it interferes somewhat with a plan which I had laid down, there are many reasons for considering this very important matter at once.

It is my desire to deal with the question with due solemnity—not to allow myself to forget that to the large majority of my countrymen the name of Christ is as the name of God, and that many, who call themselves Christians and who at the same time deny the Godhead of Jesus, regard him as occupying a very lofty place of superhuman dignity. But while, on every ground, some regard is due to the religious feelings of others, a far higher regard is due to Truth; while we would not willingly shock tender sensibilities, nor outrage pious sentiment, we must not shrink from the infliction of a temporary pain which we firmly believe will conduce to higher and lasting happiness. The world, and especially that part of it which is called the Church,

has suffered long, but never more than at this moment, from unworthy equivocations and from studied silences. Hundreds of excellent people, clergymen and ministers of all denominations, continue to use phrases, which already possess a definite popular value, in a private sense of their own; and the result is that they contrive to leave their congregations under the false impression that they and the preacher think exactly alike. If the preacher honestly believes that this kind of teaching can advance his hearers one step, he is utterly mistaken. If he thinks he is preserving the worn out coin by putting a new stamp of his own upon it, he will be doing his best to encourage false weights and measures and unconsciously to deprave the intellectual vigour of those who listen to him.

Not in this way must we deal with the greatest theological question of the day. We must have no mental reservations, no pious frauds, not the very shadow of equivocation. If we are wrong, and Christendom is right, our great plainness of speech will enable the orthodox the more easily to refute our errors; while those who listen to us will never be able to reproach us with the concealment or the disguise of our real opinions.

The question, "What think ye of Christ?" must be prefaced by another, viz: "What do we *know* about Him?" and this again leads to the enquiry, "What are the sources of our knowledge of Christ?"

This last enquiry I will endeavour to answer first.

The sole sources of our knowledge of Christ are the New Testament, and Tradition. The former is a collection of writings purporting to give us the history of Jesus and some of the sayings and doings of himself and of his early followers. The latter—*i.e.*, Tradition—is embodied in the Creeds and practices of the organized society called the Church, which professes to have been established by Jesus himself, to have gathered all its doctrine, its rites and ceremonies from the same authority, and to be, at this day and hour, under the supernatural guidance and teaching of the glorified and deified Jesus himself.

These two authorities, viz.: the Bible and the Church, are, as every one knows, held in different estimation as authorities by different sections of Christendom. Some put the Bible before the Church, others put the Church before the Bible. But both are agreed in admitting that without either the one or the other we should have known nothing whatever of Jesus Christ.

We must remember this. It is an important fact. No claim is now set up that we know of Jesus as we know of God, by intuition. No one has ever been so bold as to say that a belief in Jesus as God is part of Natural Religion. On the contrary, this entire absence of Christ from the conclusions of natural theology, and the utter incongruity of the idea of God becoming incarnate with the natural religious sentiments, have been dwelt upon by the advocates of Revealed Religion, as one of its greatest

recommendations. Believers in Revelation point with pride to the fact that on this great central belief in the God-man, nature and the human heart are absolutely silent. "How would you have ever known?" they ask triumphantly, "How would you have ever known that God came down from heaven to save a ruined world, without the agency of the New Testament, or of the Church, to reveal the tidings?" Nothing can be more satisfactory than the admission which is thus made. It saves endless controversy about adaptation to man's needs, and so forth, and brings us close to the point at issue. "Is the Bible, or is the Church, or are either of them to be depended upon for strict accuracy in their respective accounts of what Jesus was, of what he did, and of what he said?

To answer (1) as regards the Church. Which of all the Churches do you mean?—from the primitive Church downwards to the Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem? Is it Eastern or Western, Episcopalian or Presbyterian? So on, we might ask, through the 300 sects of Christendom. Suppose that we have at last found the true Church established by Jesus, and that her credentials are beyond suspicion. How much can this Church tell us about Jesus Christ, that we are bound to believe without question? They will begin by saying that he was God, that he was born without a human father, that he wrought miracles, rose again from the dead, and with his human body, with flesh and bones, and all things appertaining to the completeness of man's nature ascended into Heaven, and is now

sitting on a throne at the right hand of God. Well, all this, we say, may be true, though it appears very unlikely; but how do you guarantee the truth of any one of your statements? I am quite willing to believe everything on sufficient evidence. I only want to be furnished with the proofs of all these wonderful things. The Church answers—all these things were believed and duly attested by the earliest followers and most intimate companions of Jesus, who handed them down through their early converts, through their bishops and elders, generation after generation, unchanged, till they have reached us. But supposing, I say, that you have received in this manner exactly what the companions of Jesus believed, and no more; how do you know that they were not mistaken? Oh! says the Church, they could not have been mistaken, they led such holy lives, and died as witnesses for the truth of what they affirmed. But, if my memory does not fail me, many men who have led holy lives have been miserably deceived in some of their opinions; martyrs by the hundred can be brought forward who died in defence of exactly opposite and contradictory beliefs. Opposite Churches took it in turns to kill and be killed. So the holiness of life goes for very little, and the proof of infallibility from martyrdom goes for nothing at all. Your assertion then of the absolute credibility of the earliest followers of Jesus, is of no more weight as evidence than your assertion that Jesus went up bodily into the sky. If you go on to affirm that the case was exceptional, and that

Jesus being God infallibly inspired His apostles to say that He was God, you are only arguing in a circle, and we end where we began—without reasonable proof of one of your assertions.

The argument drawn from the honesty of the apostles is, I believe, exploded, as only the most ill-informed and foolish of dogmatists will venture to say that if Jesus and the apostles were not all that they are represented to be, therefore they were rogues and impostors. The disrespect of this assumption, unwarrantable as it is, is only surpassed by its ignorance.

But the Church will say: Look at my wonderful and rapid growth, and my conquest of Paganism; my triumphs over barbarism, my fruits of civilisation. To this, one can only reply, that were the triumphs of Christendom a hundred-fold more than they have been, were there no dark corners in the Church's fold, no blood-stains on her once cruel hands, no dying yells of outraged Jew and murdered Indian mingling with her jubilee, no stone of stumbling nor rock of offence in her feeble obstructions to the progress of science, nor breath of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in her toothless maledictions, still all her finest achievements and purest virtues could never bear witness as to a matter of fact, could never supply even presumptive evidence for that which can alone be attested independently of herself. The painter might as well try to prove that one of his remote ancestry excelled in the art of music by the mere exhibition

of his own latest masterpiece. There is no logical connection whatever between the claims made by or for Jesus, and the very highest achievements of the Church.

Moreover, though it is a branch of our enquiry which we cannot now follow, the pretensions of the Church can be matched over and over again in the histories of the rise and progress of other great religions in the world besides Christianity. If the argument from success be admitted at all, it only proves too much.

So far then as the Church or Churches of Christendom are to be trusted, we can get no evidence from them worthy of the name, sufficiently trustworthy to be depended upon for an accurate account of the nature and history of Jesus Christ. For evidence, we get only assumptions.

A great deal of this that I have said respecting the Church applies equally to those who present the New Testament to us on false pretences—*i. e.*, as a Divine and infallible record of actual facts. But the New Testament itself must be considered on its own grounds. With the sole exception of the Book of Revelation, which condemns itself by its own temper and anathemas, not one of the New Testament writings makes any claim of Divine origin. The author of the Third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles expressly sets forth the human sources from which he obtained his information. While the Fourth Gospel is supplemented by a verse (John xxi. 24) from a hand, not that of the disciple John

himself: "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and we (*i.e.*, the writer and others) know that his testimony is true."

This is the most decided expression which I can remember to occur in all the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, approaching to a claim even for accuracy. There is not the shadow of a shade of a claim that the writings are infallibly true, or that they were written under Divine inspiration. I think this fact in itself furnishes an additional reason why we should give to the historical parts of the New Testament due consideration. They do not insult our understanding by any preposterous claim. When or by whom they were written no one can say with certainty. All that is certainly known is that the oldest copies of them which are now in existence were written 300 years after the events which they profess to record. These copies may or may not be faithful—may or may not have tallied with the originals, which are now lost. At all events, we cannot go further back for evidence than that late date; for although some early writings may contain quotations, or what seem to be quotations, of the words of our oldest MSS., this fact would not guarantee that the whole of the rest of the books from which they quoted stands correctly copied in our MSS. It would only go to give weight to a probability, and that is all. The external evidence then for the literal accuracy of the New Testament histories is next to nothing, and we are therefore driven to weigh the historical claims of the books from a consideration of their contents.

What internal evidence, then, do we find that the writers of the first five books of the New Testament are giving us authentic and trustworthy history?

To answer this important question several essays have been already written, and the subject is not even yet exhausted. The "*English Life of Jesus*," published by Mr. Scott, of Ramsgate, is perhaps the best of all. It would carry us too far away from our main line to examine minutely the books of the New Testament referred to. Suffice it to say, as a summing up of the careful analysis and criticism of learned men, that these New Testament narratives have some basis of fact; that there really was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, and that his life was, according to the standard of those times, extremely pure and beneficent; that he made himself obnoxious to the Jewish authorities of the age, who secured his condemnation by the Roman Governor on the accusation that he was dangerous to the Empire.

These bald outlines are common to all the books, and may fairly be trusted as historical. But beyond that, a careful reader will observe endless contradictions and discrepancies of such a nature, as to exclude the idea that the writers were sufficiently acquainted with the ordinary facts of the life of Jesus, to justify the use of the term *historical* in speaking of their conflicting accounts. In other words, they cannot all be true at the same time; and we have no certain way of discovering which writer speaks the truth, when two or more of them give contradictory accounts of the same event. Now

if their writings only set forth events such as are commonly or even rarely occurring amongst ourselves, but at all events actually occurring, we should even then be compelled to distrust their accuracy; but when, in addition to such ordinary matters as whether Jesus was crucified on a Friday or on a Thursday, whether the genealogies of Christ's lineage from David in Matthew and Luke can be reconciled with each other, or either of them with Old Testament records, we have to accept tales of magic and miracle utterly foreign to general human experience, and in some cases purposely puerile, we are impelled by the very constitution of our own minds to distrust the books a hundred times more than ever, and to doubt almost whether there be a grain of fact at the bottom of so much palpable fiction.

But I use the word "fiction," not in a sense derogatory to the honour of the writers. That these Gospels were *not* written by men who knew Jesus personally cannot be doubted, and therefore they wrote from second-hand—aye, third and fourth-hand if you like—no one knows how long after Jesus and his followers had been dead and buried; but whoever wrote them may have written honestly what had been told them, what had become the floating and perpetually growing legendary traditions about a very remarkable and remarkably kind and good man. What would not one give for a Peter, a James, or a John to come forward and tell us the simple life of Christ as he saw it and understood it!

But we possess not one single fragment of writing

upon which we can lay our hands and say with absolute confidence :—this, at least, is a perfectly true and uncorrupted statement of some part of the history or sayings of Jesus, written by one who knew and saw and heard him, who was not under any delusion at the time, and who wrote in perfect good faith.

You will perceive then that the only sources of our knowledge of Christ are untrustworthy—deeply, hopelessly, untrustworthy—and that we are driven to almost mere guessing to form any conception of him at all. Our time is now all but exhausted, and our work this morning as unwelcome as any work could be, but it is necessary in attempting to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ?" to shew first of all that almost whatever we think of Christ is equally without historical foundation, that we have no evidence worthy of the name, to support the Church's claim as to his nature, his character, his deeds, and his sayings. Probability more or less strong is all we can attain unto on this point.

Nor will it avail anything to appeal to the endurance of Christianity in proof of the truth of the Gospels. Brahminism was almost driven out of India by Buddhism 1000 years or so before Christ, but Brahminism recovered from the shock, drove Buddha beyond her walls, and resumed her primæval sway, and has a history at least 3,000 years old. Buddhism in turn has conquered Eastern Asia, and with 400,000,000 of believers bids defiance to the waves of Christianity which break in ripples on her

wide spread shore. Mahomedanism too, beaten back from Western Europe by the monogamy of Northern races, has won vast populations in India before whom Christianity kneels in vain.

It only remains for me to say this morning, that it was absolutely necessary to clear the ground for the proper consideration of our thoughts about Christ. It is true beyond question, that no absolute reliance can be placed either on the teachings of the Church, or on the New Testament narratives; but it is equally true that a man of surpassing goodness, and possessing the very genius of true religion, lived and died in Judæa about eighteen centuries ago; that his life and death exercised, and still exercise, a vast power over millions of men and women; that in spite of the exaggerations of an almost pardonable idolatry, in spite also of the clouds of incredible myth in which his biography has been shrouded, there still remains a residuum of substantial fact, and a valuable contribution to the religious and moral principles of mankind, which only a bigoted scepticisim would ignore, and which, as devout Theists, we are as much bound to recognise and to use, as we are bound to reject and denounce the falsehood and superstition which have been mixed up with the sober truth.

Next Sunday I shall hope to bring before you certain principles which should guide us in forming an opinion as to the nature and character of Jesus Christ. This will give us an opportunity of explaining the grounds on which we reject not only the

orthodox belief that he was equal with God, but also the Arian belief, that he was more than man.

A discourse like this is, in my opinion, like offering a stone to one who wants bread. But now and then such discourses are absolutely necessary, and I trust it will not have been altogether without spiritual nourishment if it should lead a single doubting or enquiring heart to the Father's footstool, with this petition, "Lead me in thy truth and teach me; be Thou also my guide, and lead me for thy name's sake."

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL,
ON SUNDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 1871.

"*What think ye of Christ?*"

MATTHEW XXII. 42.

LAST Sunday our attention was directed to the preliminary enquiry as to the trustworthiness of the New Testament, and Tradition, from which alone we derive our knowledge of Christ.

Finding these sources to be—both of them—hopelessly mixed up with falsehood and superstition, we are driven to conjecture how much genuine history they contain, and to tax our own imagination in determining between what is true and what is false in the documents before us.

My efforts this morning will be directed towards the discovery of some principle which ought to guide us in our attempt to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ?" Have we any broad facts, that no reasonable person would dispute, on which to build up a consistent outline of the history and character before us?

If it should appear illogical to accept one part and to reject another part of these Gospel narratives, we can only meet the objector by saying that we must

treat the New Testament exactly as we would treat any other ancient book which professed to give us history, and yet contained much that was fictitious. No one calls in question the fairness, or the logic, of this arbitrary selection when applied to other books; indeed, it is the prevailing custom among scholars in our day to exercise this sifting faculty upon many works which had heretofore remained unquestioned.

In the first place, we should put clearly before our minds the broad facts which no reasonable person would question, and then measure the probability or the improbability of any statement about Jesus by its consistency with those fundamental facts.

These facts are few in number, and if we accept anything at all from the Christian records, we cannot well accept less, viz.—that a man named Jesus, also called Christ, was born in Judæa at the beginning of our era; that he was remarkably kind and good, of simple habits and unsullied purity; that he became a teacher of religion, and opposed the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees of his time; that either he or his followers made a claim that he was the Messiah, and to that extent he would become obnoxious to the Roman Empire; that his religious adversaries, the chief priests, had no power to put him to death legally for his revolutionary religious ideas, and so they compassed his condemnation and death by an accusation before the Roman Governor that he claimed to be King of the Jews. For had not Jesus opposed the priests, they would not have taken any notice of his claim to be the Messiah.

And had not some such claim been made by him or for him, the Roman Governor would never have taken any notice of his attack upon the Jewish customs.

Now, what manner of man was this? His fate—his misfortunes—are his credentials. To have become the object of priestly persecution, and to have held out until death; not to have basely recanted, nor to have fled from the consequences of his temerity, are sure and unmistakeable signs of his greatness of soul. If we knew nothing more of him than this, this, by itself, would entitle Jesus to our highest esteem. It is, moreover, the key to his whole character, and furnishes us with the surest possible test by which to measure the truth or falsehood of what has been said or written about him.

He was therefore at all events earnestly religious, a hater of priestly tyranny, a bold reformer, and an unflinching martyr.

But we have one more unquestioned fact before us, viz., the fact of his influence. He did certainly succeed in bringing over to his own views many of his countrymen, or else he would not have excited opposition. His success was the head and front of his offending. And this gives us some guarantee that he understood human nature; that not only his plainness of speech, but also his clearness of thought, qualified him to become a popular teacher. The poor in his day had the Gospel preached to them, and the common people heard him gladly. He must have been gifted largely with what we call "common

sense," and have exercised it pretty freely in dealing with the religious rites and doctrines of his time, or else he could not have been listened to. This will be another test of the truth or falsehood of some passages in which very unwise sayings are attributed to him.

Nor was his influence limited to his life on earth. Although only about thirty years of age when he was crucified, he had said and done enough to make his memory immortal—to establish one of the most important of the religions of the world. No one who had not really led a good life could have been the founder of Christianity; no one who had not been eminently pure and honourable, and kind, could have ever reached the pinnacle of worship on which the hearts and minds of nearly all Christendom have placed him. This, too, is a test by which we may very nearly get at the truth or detect the falsehood in the narratives of his life.

But inasmuch as perfect and minute consistency is not to be found in any human being uninterruptedly from the cradle to the grave, we must on the other hand beware of drawing too much an ideal Christ, instead of seeking to know what he actually was. It will not altogether do to reject every blemish which the records have left upon his character, his teaching, his example. These blemishes tend rather to confirm their testimony than to weaken it, whenever they do not exceed a certain degree of inconsistency. When we say, then, that we ought to use the broad unquestioned facts as

tests of the truth or falsehood of the narratives, and of the doctrines built upon them, we do not mean to draw a hard and fast line not to be overstepped, but only to bear in mind that these facts are the only ground we have to go upon, the only basis on which to form our estimate of Jesus at all, and therefore they must, in every step of our enquiry, be scrupulously regarded.

In testing by these facts the primary doctrine of orthodox Christendom that Jesus was the Almighty God incarnate in human form, the first thing that strikes us is that *exactly in so far as Jesus appeared, lived and died as a man, suffering himself to undergo all the ordinary and extraordinary vicissitudes of human life, just so far*—IF HE WAS GOD—*was God imposing upon and deceiving His own creatures.* It sounds even blasphemous to say this; but it is not I who say it, but the orthodox who compel us to come to no other conclusion. They say that if he was not God, he was an impostor; we say that if there was imposture at all, which we deny, it would have been practised upon men by his being God, and yet seeming to be only man. It is an established fact that every one around him in Galilee and Judæa took him for a man,—a man, it may be, endowed with miraculous powers, but powers shared in by others of his contemporaries. These miraculous powers, in which of course we utterly disbelieve, are at all events ascribed in like manner to other men, and therefore did not avail to disclose to his contemporaries the Godhead of Jesus. If he was good

beyond all human goodness, still the men of his time knew it only for *human* goodness, and were not in the least degree enlightened by it as to the Divine or God-nature of Christ. Not one man, woman or child in all that land ever dreamed that he was God—not his own father and mother, nor his brethren and sisters, nor his nearest and dearest disciples believed such a thing for a moment; or they could not have forsaken him and fled at the very first breath of real danger of being identified with him. They would have rushed to him for shelter instead. The Chief Priests and Scribes, the Roman Centurions, Pilate and Herod, and every person named in the narratives, took him for a man, and nothing more. Then, I say, those broad facts of his history drive us into one of these two positions: either that he was really and only what every one thought he was—a man, and only a man; or, if he was also the Almighty God, God was purposely imposing upon his own creatures, hiding the real truth from them, and suffering them to offer outrage and insult to their own Creator in disguise. The records tell us *never*, that Jesus said he was God, they do tell us that Jesus prayed to God like other men, and called Him "My God and my Father," and besought Him to rescue him from his persecutors, nobly yielding at the last in those eternal words of courage and devotion, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." On the cross he breathes forth the divinest words which ever fell from martyred lips, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." But if Jesus were all

this time Almighty God, and therefore knowing that he was God, pretending to be only man, it was an imposture as unpardonable as it was gigantic. No falsehood of man ever reached the depth of such dissimulation as this. Again I say, it is you Christians, who by implication call one of the world's noblest men an impostor. It is not I. My deep reverence for Jesus, inspired as it is by his being transparent in thought, and word, and deed, and truthful unto death, rouses my indignation at your unconscious blasphemy, when you would fain tell us that Jesus was only acting a part, that amidst all his agony of human fear, and the bitter pains of physical and mental crucifixion, he was exulting secretly in the knowledge that he could not really die, and that in a day or two his wounds would be healed, and his human body restored to him as before. Out upon such an insult to God, such a mockery of man! I think that imposture is nearly played out. At all events, the broad facts already spoken of, stand in everlasting contradiction to the Church's belief in the Godhead of Christ. Such monstrosities as these would never have appeared among human beliefs at all, had it not been for the fundamental assumption that God is not a moral Being, that He is under no obligation to his own eternal laws of right—under no obligation to His creatures; that He may do without blame, or word of reproach from us whom He has made, that which His own voice within us bids us abhor. To this is owing, that many sayings in the history of Jesus

which Christians would shrink from uttering themselves, they readily excuse on the ground that he was a God, and might do as he pleased; that it was not wrong in him, *e.g.*, to treat his mother with a studied indifference, nor to use harsh invective against his clerical opponents, because he was superhuman.

The next claim made for Jesus which we must test by the unquestioned facts, is the claim of Messiahship. It is a fact beyond all dispute, that the Messiah or Christ, for whom the Jewish nation had been so long waiting, was in almost every particular the exact opposite of what Jesus of Nazareth really was. Without examining all the so-called Messianic prophecies, for which we have no time, we are justified in inferring from their general tone, that the Messiah was expected to be the temporal sovereign and deliverer of the Jewish people, was to rescue them from Roman vassalage, to conquer for them all their enemies, and to place them as a nation at the head of the world.

To give but one or two specimens of Messianic prophecy, there is the 110th Psalm, *e.g.*, said to be quoted by Jesus in his own favour, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool." In the 5th and 6th verses of that Psalm, we read concerning this Messiah, "The Lord at thy right hand shall wound even kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries."

Such a picture of a blood-stained warrior can hardly belong to the meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth. Again, take a favourite chapter selected by the Church for reading in Passion Week, the 63rd of Isaiah, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah; this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me;" (a triumphant text for the believers in the atonement, if it only stopped there, but read on,) "for I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." Such passages, and there are more of them, show the impossibility of believing that Jesus was the Messiah expected by the Jew. He was indeed *not* the Christ, in the legitimate sense of the word, as understood by the people of his own times. If driven from that position, the orthodox urge that he was the Christ in the sense of being the anointed, or appointed Messenger of God, then we can only say that he was one out of many Christs—that every man has his definite mission in the world to which he has been called by the regular and constant providence of God, and each in turn is in this sense a "Christ." But this is only playing with words, and we may be very sure that in the time of Jesus, only one broad signification—viz., that of a

temporal ruler and deliverer—was attached to the name of Messiah or Christ.

Now, what light is thrown upon this claim by the facts? Nothing can be clearer. The Jews saw that Jesus was not the Messiah they were looking for, or they would thankfully have welcomed and obeyed him. The Romans *proved* that he was not that Messiah by putting him to death at the request of the Jews. It is even reported of Jesus that he said, "My kingdom is not of this world," whereas the kingdom of the true Messiah was of this world alone. Even his disciples, after his death, admitted that they had been deceived in their expectations, saying, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, but now this is the third day since he was crucified." An important question here arises, how far Jesus himself originated or sanctioned the application to himself of this title of Christ. The records on this point are hopelessly at variance. In the first three Gospels he is represented as only acknowledging the title at the very close of his ministry, and that only in secret to his disciples. In the fourth Gospel he is represented as being recognised as the Messiah from the very beginning by John the Baptist, by the people of Samaria, and as arguing in proof of it publicly before the people, from first to last.

If one so simple-minded, modest and spiritual as he was, ever yielded to the temptation of assuming such a lofty and imperious title, it could only have been in consequence of the perpetual disparagement,

obloquy and contempt which he received at the hands of the hierarchy in Judæa. It is of the very essence of abuse, which comes from people who do not command our respect, to make us proud and conceited, to generate all sorts of vain fancies about our worth, our position, and our mission. Whereas our real successes ever tend to make us more and more lowly, more diffident, more intense in our efforts to do good. The sneers of the Pharisees and Chief Priests may have thus swelled the bosom of Jesus into proud and ambitious thoughts, while the gratitude of those to whom he had been good and kind would overwhelm him with humility, and lead him to say to each one in turn, "Go thy way, and see thou tell no man." We shall find it so ourselves; unjust depreciation kindles conceit, while every acknowledgment of service actually rendered only makes us humble and lowly, and long to do more. Only on such ground as this can we conceive it possible that Jesus allowed himself to be called Messiah or Christ, if he ever did so at all, and even then he would only do so in a sense new and altogether unintelligible alike to a Caiaphas and a Pontius Pilate. It is, however, open to considerable doubt whether the story of his claim to the Messiahship was not originated mythically out of the false charge preferred against him by the Sanhedrim of aiming at a civil revolution. The name of Christ was not attached to the inscription on the cross, said to be written by Pilate, although he did not scruple to describe him as the King of the Jews.

Collateral history tells us that there were others besides Jesus who assumed the title and aimed at the dignity and power of Messiahship, but all of these were political agitators. And this brings us to reflect that there is not a single one out of all the high claims put forth by the devotees of Jesus, but what has its parallel elsewhere.

Is it claimed that he was the Almighty God incarnate? The second person of the Hindu triad, Vishnu, had been incarnate nine times over before Jesus was born. In like manner the Buddhists deified the founder of their faith, and believe him to be perpetually incarnate in the Grand Lama of Thibet.

Is it claimed that Jesus was miraculously born without a human father? Not to refer to Pagan mythology, the New Testament itself tells us of a Melchisedec who was born "without either father or mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life."

Is it claimed that Jesus wrought miracles? The New Testament itself describes Jesus as acknowledging that the sons of the Pharisees had similar power, and no recorded miracle of Jesus can surpass the exuberant marvel of the exploits of Moses in the wilderness, or those of Elisha, whose dead bones, it is said, restored a dead man to life.

Is it claimed that Jesus was absolutely without sin? The same has been said of Sâkya-Mouni; and, by Jesus himself, of Nathaniel: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Of David

even it is written, that he was a man after God's own heart. Of Job it is said that "he was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." And these very words are ascribed to Jehovah, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." And in the midst of agonies far surpassing those of Jesus' last hours, it is also said of Job, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with folly."

Is it claimed that Jesus rose again from the dead the third day? What is that beside the marvel of Elijah, who went up alive into the sky in a chariot and horses of fire?

Is it claimed that he alone taught man his duty to man and to God? He does but quote the noblest sayings from the ancient Jewish Scriptures, and we now know that the same eternal lessons were known to so-called heathen sages long before the birth of Christ.

It is true, my friends, that on every hand we find parallels for all that we were once accustomed to believe to be peculiar to Jesus of Nazareth, and from this fact we can only draw the conclusion that if he were proved to be God by these tokens, others beside him must take their places on the throne of Deity, and our religion must once more degenerate into Polytheism; but if all these pretensions are alike untrue, then Jesus must take rank among the noblest and best of men, if you will; but man he is, and only man, helping us a thousand times

more because he is only man, both by his precepts and his example, than if he had been God; for otherwise, were he more than man, we could never hope to imitate his greatness, and to call his goodness in that case "virtue," would be only to desecrate the most precious word which we can take upon our lips.

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, ON SUNDAY, 12TH NOVEMBER, 1871.

"*I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*"

THE FOURTH GOSPEL, v. 30.

As a sequel to the last two discourses, it may be useful to pursue our examination of the life and character of Jesus of Nazareth. We have so far broken the ties which bound us to Christianity as to take up a position not only perfectly independent of it, but unmistakeably antagonistic to it.

All the churches and sects of Christendom, including a large portion of the Unitarian Church, agree in regarding Jesus as more than man, as having been divinely commissioned in quite an exceptional manner to the work of a prophet or teacher of religion. Even this slender fibre of the parting cable we must not scruple to break, or else we shall find in it a spell strong enough to entangle us in a dangerous proximity to superstition, which will involve our placing Jesus not only at the head of a long line of the world's benefactors, but on a pinnacle by himself, in a category from which every other human name will be excluded.

Were we to retain this last remnant of the old idolatry, we should find ourselves using the name of Jesus in our devotions in a way in which we should not venture to use the name of any other human being; we should also be driven to apply the epithets, Lord, Redeemer, Saviour, to him when we should shrink from applying these epithets to any one else. Though the Theist may have ever so exalted an opinion of the human excellence of Jesus, yet one thing he cannot do—he cannot refer to Jesus in any terms which the Christian or half-Christian would misunderstand as a tacit agreement with the last shred of orthodox belief on this point.

If we are told, in reply to this, that there never was before or since so perfect a human being as Jesus, then our answer must be:—The New Testament actually records some human imperfections in him. If, however, fighting with our weapons they say, "We do not believe that part of the New Testament which records his imperfections," the manifest inference will be that their ideal of Jesus is purely imaginary: and, on the same principle, we should be at liberty to strip off all blemishes in biographies which were not infallible, and might say of Moses, Confucius, Socrates, or of any one else, that he was a perfect man. It is not by any means a difficult task to write a biography which our contemporaries would consider to be perfectly blameless. It would be impossible to write one which posterity would equally regard as perfect. No doubt the writers of the Gospels thought they had left not a

single stain upon their biographies of Jesus, but the steady onward march of humanity has raised the standard of virtue since those early times, and we now have to condone what they regarded as praiseworthy, and to condemn what they condoned. The day must come at last for revising the verdicts of by-gone generations; when even the disciples of one of the world's noblest and best of men hesitate to take his language of denunciation and scorn upon their own lips, and when even they who worship him as God are driven by the altered conditions of society to explain away some of his plainest precepts, or to treat them with open disregard. Even the example which once thrilled a whole generation with admiration is afterwards looked upon with a calm curiosity, and hardly an effort is made to imitate or to reproduce it.

We should, however, be equally in the wrong were we to follow in the steps of those who call Jesus "Lord, Lord," and yet do not the things which he bids them, or to rush into the opposite extreme of depreciating the great merit of Jesus and his work. It is for us to measure him not by the standard of our times, but of his own. It is our duty to endeavour to recall his position, the state of his country and people as he wandered over the hills and plains of his native land, the constant agitation then going on to shake off the Roman yoke, the hindrances to their faith and religion which were perpetually begotten by the formalism and exclusiveness of the Jewish hierarchy; in short, to deal with his

memory as we would that other men should deal with our own, and give him credit for having done his best in a great and terrible crisis to serve his fellow-men. If, in tracing the course of his life or the conflicting records of his sayings, we find it hard to ascertain the truth, it will only be fair to give him the benefit of the doubt so long as we are not entering upon the enquiry with foregone conclusions, and are not determined to make him out to have been perfect in spite of every testimony on the other side.

The simplest key to the character of Jesus is, I think, given us in our text. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent me." Rightly or wrongly, he seems to have been persuaded that he had a call of duty to which every other consideration was to give way; and in this particular I cannot discover any important variation in the narratives; they all alike testify that he proclaimed himself the Servant of God, and here and there are very distinct declarations of what he considered God's service to consist in. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." In other words, he felt himself called to serve God by serving men—to do the Father's will by doing good to the brethren. This he did in two principal ways: by his words and by his deeds. Of his actual deeds we can say little or nothing, because hardly a single benevolent action is recorded of him which is not more or less mixed up with miracle. He is said to have fed the hungry, to have healed the

sick, restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, reason to the insane; under his magic touch the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and even the dead restored to life. We can only dimly imagine that he was one of the Therapeuts of the age, and did work some cures according to the pathological twilight of those times. More than this is hopeless conjecture, as every act of his benevolence has been shrouded in unbelievable myth.

But under this subject we must include his ordinary demeanour to the people around him. There was a charming worldliness and freedom in his social habits for which the over-good people condemned him. By his friendliness with the outcasts of society he added to the odium with which society regarded him, and I think we are justified in saying that Christendom owes to the example of Jesus every effort which has from time to time been made to raise the lower classes from their miserable poverty and degradation. Nor can we forget that the people who now take the best care of their poor are the Jews. Few as they have been and far between, the Howards and Elizabeth Frys of the western nations caught the inspiration of their tremendous love and sympathy from the example and precepts of the Prophet of Nazareth—the friend of sinners.

Nor can we fairly separate this noble feature in His life from that beautiful religious belief in the Fatherhood of God, which was the motto of his mission. In Him that doctrine first took practical shape, and developed into a world-wide brotherhood.

No one was to Him an outcast—no one was too far gone astray to be his friend. Every one, however defiled with the mire of sin, or bespattered with the world's scorn, could find a seat by his side and a welcome to his heart. In spite of all his blemishes, he was and is still the most friendly of men—the man in whom met the greatest powers of self-sacrifice and sympathy, manifested by his bursting through every social barrier that he might kindle love and hope in a despairing heart. Greater to me is this heroism than even his faithfulness as a martyr and his obedience unto death. For a hundred that will die for the truth, there is only one who will spoil his own life and ruin his social position by contact with the degraded.

It might be urged that because Jesus was born in a humble position, this habit of his associating with outcasts was an easy one. But such an objection is only based upon the assumption that society in Judæa and Galilee was like our own. Even if the parents of Jesus were very poor people, there is not a grain of evidence to show that they belonged to an inferior caste. Every one learned some useful occupation, and even the highly cultured Paul was a tent maker. The evidence tends to lead us to regard Joseph and Mary as persons of some consequence, related by blood to the priests, and as resenting almost as much as did the Pharisees the eccentricities of their son. In fact Jesus outraged religious rather than social feeling, although in truth the social and religious were then nearly identical. It was against the law and customs

of the Jews for Jesus to touch the leprous and to converse with Samaritans, as it was against the whole national soul for him to consort with the Publicani, whom the Jews not unreasonably both detested and despised.

We have also other indications that the social position of Jesus was not a lowly one, for he is constantly represented as addressing the chief priests and scribes and lawyers as their equal, and the Roman Centurions are reported to have spoken to him with the utmost courtesy. His position as a sort of wandering friar may also have added to, instead of diminishing, the public respect; as is the case now all over the East, where the religious orders are treated with the utmost deference. This brief digression is so far pertinent inasmuch as there is a school of critics who have, it seems to me, unfairly disparaged this really beautiful trait in the character of Jesus, the theological effect of which is only just now, after eighteen centuries, beginning to bear fruit. We are only just now awakening to the belief that men of every clime, of every race, of every creed, are alike dear to the one God and Father of us all. But this despised Galilæan Jew had believed it, and acted upon it, and been hated and murdered for it nearly 2,000 years ago.

Every time he took to his brotherly bosom the forlorn outcast, the pagan and fraudulent publican, the hated Samaritan and the dog of a Canaanite, he struck a blow at the pride and exclusiveness, not only of his own people, but of the Christian people

and Christian churches, which have done and are doing in His name the exact opposite of that which He commanded and taught them how to do.

Under the subject of the deeds of Jesus, we must, of course, include the great work of preaching and teaching in which the last three years of his life were spent.

Though we cannot, on this occasion, enter into any minute examination of his doctrines, his precepts and his denunciations, we must take into consideration the enormous benefit which he conferred upon mankind through his active and aggressive attacks upon the errors and vices of the age in which he lived. It must have required no little moral courage to unmask the hollowness of the religious profession which filled the air around him, to speak almost scornfully of those rites and ceremonies which the Pharisees had been wont to look upon as the most important part of their duty to God, to throw discredit upon the occupation of the scribes and lawyers and to accuse them of trampling upon that Sacred Book over which their lives were spent, to charge them with making the Word of God of none effect by their traditions.

These attacks, upon what seemed to him only huge hypocrisies, were further aggravated by his open violation of Sabbath observance. To look now at the way in which the Sunday is observed in Scotland—a way however utterly unlike the Jewish—one would never have believed that Jesus, who is one of the Gods in that country, left behind him such an un-

sparing rebuke of Sabbatarianism. Indeed, from all we can gather regarding Jesus' own conduct and speech about the Sabbath, we only wonder that Christians have been able to preserve the day even as a day of rest from labour. Jesus said nothing in its favour, and did all he could to undermine public regard for it. It is, I think, most fortunate for us that the Jewish reverence for the Sabbath as a day of rest did survive the hostile teaching of Jesus, till Sabbath observance became incorporated into the laws of Christian lands. But we ought, nevertheless, to confess our obligations to Jesus for giving a heavy blow, if not a death blow, to the superstitious regard for the Sabbath as a day on which amusement is unlawful. His reply on one occasion to a remonstrance from the Pharisees was a direct contradiction of the statement in the Fourth Commandment, that God rested on the seventh day from all his work. "My Father," he said, "worketh up to this moment." He could not have said more plainly, "God never rested, nor rests at all;" and the corollary to that is, that God never gave to men the Fourth Commandment as we have it.

The attitude of hostility to the corruptions of his time, which brought down upon him the anger of the whole Jewish hierarchy, and at last ended in his accusation and death, was in itself a benefit to mankind. Even supposing that he was too hard upon the chief priests and scribes and rulers, that he did not make sufficient allowances for their antecedents and surroundings, yet the attack was made in a

righteous cause. He sought only to set free the minds and souls of his countrymen who were overshadowed by a heavier tyranny than that of the Roman Conquest. They were bound hand and foot to a ceremonial as useless for moral purposes as it was wearisome. They were growing more and more unhappy under their self-righteous routine, the more exclusive and proud that their observances made them. They clung round that Temple of theirs in Jerusalem till they forgot that their God was the Creator and Ruler of the wide universe. They offered there their prayers and paid their tithes with painful punctiliousness till they forgot that "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything who giveth to all life and breath and all things."

But the work of Jesus was to bring out into the pure air of heaven men and women who were growing pale at heart with the confinement of the stifling sanctuary—to bring out into the glorious sunshine of the Father's universal presence those poor souls who were getting darker and colder and more sad from day to day in the dim religious light of Levitical ceremony. And for this we thank him with our hearts' best approval. We are glad to know that he never flinched nor wavered, that he went on proclaiming to the last the universal love of the Father in Heaven, who only wanted men to be good and holy, and who did not want their fastings and long prayers and long faces. We are delighted

and honoured to think that another great soul wa added to the ranks of those who fought valiantly for truth, for liberty of soul from priestly tyranny, and that he died—sword in hand—as brave men should die, with his face to the foe.

These were the deeds for which we bless his memory, and which the world is only privileged to witness at rarest intervals. And the secret of his strength and fidelity lay in that determination of his which I took for my text, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent me." All the great and noble deeds which have adorned humanity have been done by the power of this principle. When a man has once mastered himself, so as to give himself up as it were to a Will, higher and better than his own, to be taught and led and commanded what to do and how to do it; when he makes it his constant duty and delight to ask God for Heavenly wisdom and strength and fortitude to carry him through duties which are toilsome and dangerous; when he resolves to fight the battle out to its bitter end from no other motive in the world than to do what is right and to speak what is true, then that man is wielding a power which the world, and more especially the Church, can but ill-measure and can only feebly resist. He has given himself away to God and to God's cause, and along with that has cast away the chief elements of his own weakness and has broken down the greatest hindrances to his success. A new power has possessed him; a Divine impetus throbs in his veins, and an iron

strength and stability plants every footstep in his march.

But vast and rare as is such power, and magnificent as are its achievements, it does not make any one wholly free from error in judgment, nor absolutely perfect. It has been more than once coupled with great ignorance and even with superstition, and often with the faults common to fanaticism; from some of these Jesus himself was not free, and therefore our admiration for his true nobility is very properly chastened by a due recognition of his failings, so that our homage may not degenerate into idolatry. But when all has been said on both sides, we are forced to admit that the world has been advanced wherever the spirit of Jesus as it were re-appeared. Wherever a true surrender to the Father's will—*i.e.*, a firm and unflinching devotion to a righteous cause has brought one of our fellow-men into mortal conflict with the powers of falsehood and corruption around him, his life has been a burning and shining light on the gloom of humanity and his death has shed its lustre from generation to generation.

"Beloved, let our light so shine before men that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father, who is in heaven."

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, ON SUNDAY 19TH NOVEMBER, 1871.

"*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.*"
MATTHEW v. 17.

I NOW purpose to consider some of the aspects of Jesus of Nazareth, as a teacher of morality and religion—a branch of our subject far more difficult than any which we have hitherto considered, inasmuch as it is all but impossible to distinguish in the records between what he did and what he did not say.

We must, however, bear in mind at the very outset of our enquiry into his teachings, that it is a matter of no importance to us what this or that great teacher may have taught. We are not in the least degree bound to accept, without question, the opinion or religious belief of any one of our fellow-men. It is of the very essence of true religious conviction that we should cherish it, only because it commends itself to our minds as true, and not because a great prophet or teacher was the first to proclaim it. If we were once to place ourselves as unquestioning disciples at the feet of Jesus or of any one else among the world's most illustrious men, we should

have to embrace all their errors along with any truth they might have to impart; we should have to lay aside our reasoning powers, and our moral judgment, and to that extent do violence to our own instinct as men, and not only forego the highest of our prerogatives, but also evade the highest of our obligations.

I believe that it can be shewn that the preponderating elements in the teaching of Jesus are in favour of that pure Monotheism which is so precious to ourselves and are against the essential doctrines of Christianity which we oppose. I believe it can be shewn that in his religious belief, Jesus of Nazareth was a strict Jew and not a Christian, and that while he shared in some of the delusions of his age, and perhaps allowed himself to be associated with the wildest dreams of the apostolic times, he nevertheless believed in only one God, the Father of all men, absolutely spiritual and invisible; that, so far, he was a pure Theist and, therefore, a disbeliever in the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the second person thereof, and the atonement for sin by his own death. But all this agreement with us and more, if it could be discovered, would not entitle him to our unquestioning submission, or to the renunciation of our right to criticize his moral and religious teachings at our pleasure.

The enquiry, however, has an interest of its own arising from the claim made by the Christian Churches that Jesus is the founder of their faith. If the doctrines now held in such high regard by Christians owe their origin to Jesus himself, we ought to be able

without difficulty, not only to discover them in the records of his sayings, but to find them prominent and unmistakeable on every page. His contemporaries knew nothing of a Trinity in their venerable creed, why did not Jesus teach that doctrine in the Sermon on the Mount, or to his own immediate followers in private? They knew nothing of a second person incarnate, why did not Jesus tell them openly that there was not only a Father in Heaven, but an Eternal Son of equal Godhead, and that he himself was that only-begotten and Eternal Son? They knew nothing of the atonement for the sins of the whole world by his death on the cross, why then did he not tell them beforehand what he was going to die for, and how his death would be regarded in the sight of God the Father. They knew nothing of intercession through this Man-God mediator, how is it then that he did not embellish the prayer which he recommended for their use with the now common formula "through Jesus Christ our Lord?" Such questions as these may be multiplied at will. But, on the other hand, it may fairly be urged that the fourth gospel does give some ground for supposing that Jesus taught with more or less distinctness these primary doctrines of Christianity. This, however, cannot be said of the first three gospels, and therefore we have to endeavour to account for the discrepancy between these and the fourth. The question of the authorship, and therefore of the *date* of the fourth gospel is drawing towards solution; the weight of the evidence appearing to lie against

the theory that it was written by one of Jesus' own followers, or that it appeared in the first century. The probability is that it was written towards the close of the second century, *after* the leading doctrines of Christianity were consolidated, and that it was expressly designed to support those doctrines by a new life of Jesus representing him as the teacher and founder of them. Certainly the first three Gospels with the solitary exception of the Baptismal formula at the end of Matthew, give not a word as uttered by Jesus which countenances the chief doctrines of Christianity, and these doctrines could never have rested on Scriptural authority at all, unless the fourth Gospel had been fabricated. I do not suppose that the whole of the fourth Gospel is false, nor that every word put into the mouth of Jesus is fictitious, but that the speeches as we have them are made up by the writer of the Gospel is manifest from the identity of style between the speeches of John the Baptist, of Jesus, and of the author himself, and that artifice peeps out in almost every chapter and every scene, I think, will hardly be doubted. Comparing these speeches and prayers ascribed to Jesus with those in the first three Gospels, it is impossible without a blinding prejudice to attribute them to the same individual. The doctrines are at variance, the spirit of the one is very much opposed to that of the others, and the styles are hopelessly irreconcilable. As a proof of lateness of authorship, the fourth Gospel studiously avoids giving any predictions of Jesus as to his

second coming into the world for judgment, shewing that it was written after that delusion had been exploded. It has incorporated the Logos theory of which Jesus in the first three Gospels seems to have known nothing, and which was imported from the Alexandrine Schools; and the author has contradicted the other Gospels by making it appear that the raising of Lazarus was the immediate cause of the arrest of Jesus, and that Jesus was crucified on the Thursday, instead of on the day of the Passover, not to mention the great contradictions which run through the whole of it in this matter of the claim to Messiahship. Until the fourth Gospel is proved to be written by John the disciple of Jesus, we shall be driven to prefer the records of the teachings of Jesus as given in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, not by any means as infallibly accurate, but as less glaringly fictitious than the speeches in the fourth Gospel.

Our inquiry into the teachings of Jesus naturally divides itself into the following questions :

1. What did Jesus teach about the Hebrew Scriptures ?
2. What did he teach about God ?
3. What did he teach about man ?
4. What about the future state ?
5. What about the Devil ?

I have put the question as to his teaching about the Old Testament first, that we may ascertain his opinion on the subject of external authority, and then discover where he learned his own Creed.

The words of my text, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," are manifestly apologetic. He knew that he was on the high road to reverse some of the verdicts of a venerable authority; to expand the moral application of some very literal commands, and that the people would suspect him of depraving their Bible. If he were going to throw a new light upon the old pages, if he were even purposing to supply nobler and better principles of conduct than the words of the law in some instances conveyed, his hearers would be naturally offended, and irritation might hinder them from listening. So he tries to disarm their opposition by this general tribute of respect to the law and the prophets, adding in the three following verses a statement of his aim, that in whatever he might say, he sought only to make men more loyal to God, and more faithful to their duty, than they were before. (vers. 18—20). Such words prefacing what followed, showed that he had a reverence for the Hebrew Scriptures himself, and that he did not desire to weaken that reverence in others, by what he was going to say. But what he did say afterwards, showed most clearly, that consciously, or unconsciously, he valued something more than the letter of the Old Testament, that something within the heart and conscience of man was more worthy of our homage and obedience than the best statutes which had been enacted in the venerable past. The oft-repeated phrase, "Ye have heard that it hath

been said by them of old time," applied as it was in every case to some words out of the Old Testament, and in two cases to commandments said to have been written by the finger of God on tables of stone, strikes us at once as very strange. To us who have been brought up to regard every word in the Bible as inspired by God, and to look upon the Decalogue itself as especially and accurately and miraculously given and preserved, it seems astounding that Jesus should refer to these words as things that had "been said by them of old time;" this language sounds contemptuous; even we in criticising the language of the Old Testament with the utmost freedom, and regarding it now like all other so-called sacred books, as being entirely human in its origin—even we to-day would not speak of the Bible in terms less reverent, hardly so irreverent. Indeed it is difficult to reconcile the repeated utterance of this phrase with the foregoing passage in the 18th verse, "Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot, or one tittle, shall in no-wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." He must have been speaking with some mental reserve, when he spoke there of the law, meaning, perhaps, not the letter of the Levitical code, but the moral law of God written on men's hearts. This idea is sustained by comparing this passage with that well-known commentary of his on the law of love to God and man, "On these two commandments," said he, "hang all the law and the prophets."

However, here we find him speaking in terms

bordering on disrespect of no less than five passages from the Old Testament, two of which were parts of the Decalogue. Moreover, he goes on to contrast the hardness or emptiness of those Bible precepts with his own amplification of their supposed spirit and meaning. He puts hatred and abuse on a level with murder; a lustful desire, on a level with the adulterous act. When he comes to the law enforcing the fulfilment of vows, he says vows themselves are unlawful, and forbids them on his own authority, "Swear not at all." The law of retaliation, once needed to restrain the violence of men's ferocity in revenge, he completely abrogates by the doctrine of non-resistance; and lastly, the law which sanctioned the hatred of enemies, and which is expressly put into the mouth of Jehovah, he as expressly contradicts, "But I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you," &c.

We cannot devote any time now to the consideration of those new precepts of his, but only refer to them in order to discover what was Jesus' own secret attitude to the sacred books of his own people. And I think that in spite of his manifest efforts to disguise his disregard of their authority, he has left evidence enough behind him in this Sermon on the Mount, that he attached more value to his own private judgment and moral sense, than to the words of Moses and the Prophets—and even than to the laws said to be written by God himself on tables of stone. To this extent Jesus was a Rationalist,

being ready, when occasion offered, to abandon an external authority for personal convictions; and yet willing to make the best use that he could of the venerable words which his race had preserved with such reverent and scrupulous care.

But like all others in a similar state of mind, and under similar surrounding conditions, he could play fast and loose with the *authority* of the Hebrew Scriptures. While he rose above it just as he pleased, and when he pleased, he would often quote from the sacred writings to confute some adversary, or to press home some threatening rebuke. He could call up the legends of Sodom and Gomorrah, to warn the impenitent, and to deepen self-reproach. He could even draw a parallel between his own country and that of Nineveh; and allude without any implied scepticism to the marvellous adventures of Jonah. And yet with a sort of half-disguised irony, he could cast contempt on miraculous signs, and say, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." If his disciples ventured to enquire why he taught *them* plainly, but taught the multitudes only in parables, he did not hesitate to quote one of the most dreadful passages in Isaiah as a justification of his own partiality.

If the Pharisees question his claim to the Messiahship, he tries to puzzle them with the first verses of the 110th Psalm, which, however, throw not the faintest light on his own claim.

If the Sadducees question the doctrine of resur-

rection, he answers them by what one can only call a quibble, saying, "Have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." He must have known that in the original and natural sense of those words, they could only mean, "I am the God whom Abraham believed in, whom Isaac believed in, and whom Jacob believed in;" and that they carried no doctrine whatever as to the future state. Does he not also quote commands said to be given by Jehovah, as given only by *Moses*, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, gave you this commandment," &c.?

All this shows that Jesus could not have had that deep and profound reverence for the Old Testament which many modern Christians have imputed to him, and which they insist upon as the only proper attitude towards the Bible. It is certain that he used it, and set it aside at pleasure; that he set over above it his own moral judgment, and did not speak even of the Decalogue as of words spoken, or as of laws given, by God himself. But he did not push his independence of the book so far as to disregard the religious customs and ceremonies which it enjoined. With the exception of Sabbath observance, he is represented as complying with the Levitical law, being continually in the Temple, joining in the Ritual services of the day, and taking every occasion to preach and to teach. Luke says that he taught daily in the Temple. No doubt it was due *partly* to

some of his sayings, that the Temple services fell into disuse among his Jewish disciples in the second century; but it is quite an error to suppose that Jesus, or the Apostles, did away with the service of the Sanctuary. Chiefly to St. Paul and his school may be attributed the weakening of the ceremonial ties. On the very night before his crucifixion, Jesus partook of the Passover with his disciples; and he never, as far as we can discover from the first three Gospels, broke away from the outward religious rites and ceremonies of the Levitical worship. He could not stand the austerities of ceremony at home, and said much to diminish their value; but these rested more on tradition and custom, than on the words of the Scriptures.

I have purposely left out of this discussion the references to the Old Testament, imputed to Jesus in the fourth Gospel, and I have given my reasons for it. From the other three, the inference may be drawn, that Jesus was to a great extent independent of the Bible as an authority, and only referred to it as such in speaking against the people who believed it to be Divine.

So far, he was very much in sympathy with ourselves, and our present position. We, too, wish to lose nothing from the inheritance of the past that is worth keeping, to give up not a word that can be helpful in our altered times and circumstances, but we must keep every such testimony well in hand, to allow ourselves to be mastered by no authority, however feasible, to be the slaves of no book, how-

ever much truth and comfort it may contain. Whenever in short our moral perceptions rise above the standard of a written code, we must dethrone every other power to give them the sceptre, and be only loyal to the noblest and purest truth that we have found.

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, ON SUNDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 1871.

"*After this manner, therefore, pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.*"

MATTHEW iv. 9.

WE come now to the consideration of Jesus of Nazareth as a teacher of Religion, and will endeavour to answer the question, "What did he teach about God?" Once more I will repeat the caution respecting our regard for his authority. However much we may find ourselves in agreement with his teaching, we absolutely refuse to accept him or any other great teacher as our authority and guide. We form our own religious belief for ourselves, just as he did, adopting or rejecting at pleasure the different views presented to us, and we are led by our own minds, consciences and hearts, to embrace what seems to us the noblest and purest conception of what God is. But we have a double interest in pursuing this enquiry. On the one hand, to discover the highest developments of the old Hebrew Monotheism as it presented itself in the teaching of the Nazarene, and on the other to contrast this pure

and simple and cheering belief of his with the Creed of Christendom. It is astonishing to find how very little theology there is in the sayings of Jesus as recorded in the first three Gospels. Excepting that Baptismal formula at the end of Matthew, which it is most unlikely that Jesus ever uttered, we never find him speaking of God except as one individual Being. There is not the faintest allusion to any number of Persons in the Godhead, to any Logos, or Eternal Word, or Eternal Son. On more than one occasion the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost is alluded to. In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount we find this term, "Holy Spirit," taking the place of the "good things" in the version by Matthew.

Jesus is recorded to have said something about casting out devils by the Spirit of God; and on the same occasion to have said that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was a sin which could never be forgiven. When and where this phrase—Holy Ghost—was first used, and what it meant, it is impossible to say and useless to enquire. We only know that the pure Monotheism of the Jew did not prevent the prophets and psalmists from using this term. The Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit are terms several times repeated by the Hebrew writers, and I do not think it will be questioned for a moment that on *their* lips these phrases were purely poetical, and had no reference to a composite Godhead. Ask the Jews of to-day, who ought to know best what their own sacred books mean,

and they will tell you invariably that the phrase was used to express the Divine action on the hearts of men. Desires after holiness, devotion to duty, strict integrity of heart and tongue, and the like, were all manifestations of a Divine influence which they spoke of under a metaphor singularly appropriate—viz., the air—which was at once invisible and yet perceptible, life-sustaining and yet irresistible when in violent motion. None of the Jews ever dreamed that the Spirit of God was another God, or ever intended to convey the idea that the two were really distinguishable. Had our Athanasian views about the Holy Ghost been familiar to Jesus, he could not possibly have ignored the Holy Ghost as an object of worship, equal with the Father, in his own prayers and in the prayers which he taught his followers to use. Moreover, what he is said to have said about the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is capable of a rational explanation perfectly consistent with his belief in the absolute one-ness of God, and at the same time is fatal to the Christian theory of his own equality with God. The Jews had been attributing his cure of diseases or "casting out devils" to the power of Beelzebub, whereupon he says it is an awful blasphemy to attribute a good work to an evil spirit —that if they liked to blaspheme him they might do so with impunity, but it would be an offence never to be forgiven if they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, by which all good works were performed. If, therefore, this text be claimed by Trinitarians as a proof

of the personality of the Holy Ghost, it cuts the ground from under their feet as regards the co-equal Godhead of Jesus. And if the three Gods are only one God, how can one blaspheme the Holy Ghost without blaspheming the Son, and how can one blaspheme the Son without blaspheming the Holy Ghost.

Of theology proper, there is indeed a scant supply in these synoptic discourses. The most dogmatic speeches on record which I shall proceed to quote, are in fatal contradiction to the Christian creeds. In Matt. xix. 16, 17, we read, "And behold one came and said unto him, Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" And Jesus said unto him, "Why callest thou me good, there is none good but one, that is God, but if thou wilt enter into life keep the Commandments." According to orthodoxy, all the time Jesus was saying these words, he knew himself to be God Almighty, but we will leave any candid mind to say whether or not these words of Jesus could have taught the doctrine of his own Godhead to that uninitiated enquirer. So far from it, that he implied rebuke to the enquirer for having even called him good. Surely here was a chance for him to preach the articles of the Christian faith. A man who had led a blameless life, and was struck by the moral excellence of Jesus, wishes to hear from his own lips the terms on which he could obtain eternal life. Instead of reciting to him the doctrines of the Athanasian Creed, or of the Nicene Creed, or even of the Apostles' Creed, instead

of preaching to him the doctrine of the Atonement, or the Sacramental theory, Jesus denies his own share in Godhead altogether, he will own that "none is good save one, and that is God," and tells his friend, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments." The young man* in his simplicity replies, "All these I have kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?" Now was the time to say to him, "Ah, but you have not on the robe of imputed righteousness. Your keeping the commandments has only been partial and up to the light you had. The first and great commandment is 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'—or in the words of John, 'This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his only-begotten Son.' You are trusting in your own righteousness and not depending on the perfect righteousness of Christ." Now would have been the moment to say to this earnest enquirer what has been preached for ages in some of the Christian churches as the pure Gospel, and which is expressed with a horrible vigour in the following verses:—

"Nothing either great or small,
Nothing sinner, no,
Jesus did it ALL,
Long, long ago.

"Weary working burdened one,
Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; ALL was done
Long, long ago.

"Till to Jesus' work you cling
By a simple faith,
Doing is a deadly thing,
'Doing' ends in death.

"Cast your deadly 'doing' down—
Down at Jesus' feet;
Rise in Him, in him alone,
Gloriously complete."

Compare these verses with that other verse in the Sermon on the Mount, "Not every one that saith unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *doeth* the will of my Father."

Was there a word in the whole of this discourse of Jesus with the rich young man to justify such a doctrine as these verses contain? No, just at the turning point in his life, as it were, when that young man was solemnly asking his road to heaven, Jesus, the so-called founder of Christianity, makes answer "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." I make no further comment on this reply, but to press home the unanswerable question, "What authority in these sayings of Jesus have the Christians for their doctrines?"

One more dogmatic discourse is worthy of our especial notice. You will find it in Mark xii. 28, 29, 30. One of the Scribes perceiving that he answered well, asked him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" And Jesus answered him (not

by the words of the Decalogue, but by quotation from Deuteronomy) "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:" this is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, viz.: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is none other commandment greater than these. Now if Jesus spoke these words (and the Churches teach us to believe that he did), what insolence it is for them to claim *on the authority of Jesus*, our acceptance of the Athanasian Creed, *e.g.*, which says, "Whosoever will be saved, *before all things* it is necessary that he should hold the Catholic faith, which faith, except a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly!" How dare they, in Christ's name, place, not only on a level with, but absolutely above the two great commandments, the necessity for baptism, sacramental grace, a belief in the Trinity, incarnation and atonement, justification by faith, and the repudiation of good works, as being "not pleasing to God if done before justification or without the grace of Christ" (whatever that may mean), "and as having without doubt the nature of sin?" They blame us for discarding the authority of the New Testament, and yet they practically discard it whenever they please, while professing to submit to its very letter.

Had *only* the teachings of Jesus come down to us, we should never have heard a word about Christian

doctrines, never a word about the "original righteousness" of Adam, never a word about his fall, nor a word about the original sin which all his posterity have inherited, never a word about God's immutable curse, nor of our redemption from it by Jesus' death. Those ill-starred words, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," once attributed to Jesus, have, alas for orthodoxy! been condemned by the critics as having formed no portion whatever of the oldest extant MSS. Even *that* slender prop has been snatched away, and the poor old fabric of orthodoxy is tottering to its fall.

So far we have failed to discover anything in the sayings of Jesus to justify even one of the great doctrines of Christianity. We will now turn to those frequently repeated expressions about God, which reveal to us his own religious feeling and belief; and which are only consistent with the purest Monotheism.

A few of his parables, such as that of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the lost son, and the sermon on the mount, are the most prominent among the religious discourses of Jesus. And from these we can draw but one inference, viz.: that Jesus himself was deeply imbued with the true filial spirit towards God. God was more to him than mere Jehovah. The phrase "God of hosts," translated by one of our bishops into "God of battles," as far as we know, never fell from the lips of Jesus. Nothing that could cast a shadow over the infinite tenderness

and friendliness of God entered into his conceptions of Deity. The name which above all others he loved to use, in speaking of God to men, and in addressing God in his own prayers, down to his latest breath, was "Father." I am speaking now more especially in reference to the Sermon on the Mount, and the three parables alluded to. I do not deny that among other recorded sayings and discourses, this image is clouded over and disguised by threats of eternal vengeance, and by traces of partiality, which is only another name for injustice; but the whole tone of the passages under consideration is so unmistakeably tender and lofty, as to leave upon the mind the most exalted conception of God's friendliness and fatherliness that we have hitherto heard of. And even if he said those other things, this, at least, was his best, his highest mood.

We must remember that he had around him a multitude variously composed—from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judæa, and from beyond Jordan, and that he addressed these various peoples all in the same strain, without making any distinction between Jew and Gentile. Every reader of the Bible will remember how to this mixed multitude he kept on repeating the phrase "Your heavenly Father," and reminding them at every turn that they were all God's children, and unspeakably dear to their Father in heaven.

To the perfunctory Pharisee who paraded his religious observances, he says, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy

door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." To the anxious hoarder of riches and to the care-worn poor, he says, "Take no thought for the morrow, take no thought for your life, saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." To those who doubt the friendliness of God, he says, "What man is there among you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil," *i.e.*, taking them at their worst, "if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him."

Whatever be the wisdom or the reverse of these sayings, they indicate that Jesus represented God to this mixed multitude as a kind and tender father, accessible to all alike, evil or good, Pharisee or Publican, Jew or Gentile, and enforced the return of good for evil, in these words, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." He spoke as one who himself had learnt, in the discipline of life, the exceeding preciousness of the Heavenly Father's care, who had seen in Him everything to love and to trust to, every promise of hope for the future. In the three parables named, we find the most pure and simple Gospel

which has ever been preached to men who were suffering either from excessive self-reproach or from the infamous threats which priests had uttered to terrify their slaves. Is a soul lost? Then God will never rest till it is regained. Why, even the shepherd would leave a whole flock in the wilderness to seek and to save the one sheep which had gone astray. Even the thrifty housewife will not rest till she has found the coin which rolled so perversely out of sight. Will God, then, lose a single soul that has wandered from the right way? Is not the love of the Father in heaven for his erring child something greater than that of the shepherd for his sheep, or of the poor woman for her bit of money? But this is not all. The lesson has yet to be brought home through the highest affections which belong to humanity, and so Jesus tells the story of the lost son, the son not lost by accident, but by his own waywardness, self-indulgence, and degraded habits, whom his earthly father never forgets, never ceases to love, and will welcome with fondest embraces should he ever return. Trusting to the old tie of natural affection, he lets his son depart, foreseeing all his debasement, and waiting, sadly and patiently, for the evil to work its own cure. Then the day comes for repentance, and the son retraces his steps. Before he can get near his old home he rushes into his father's arms; before he can speak a word of his humble confession his lips are sealed by his father's kisses; and, instead of justly-earned reproaches, the prodigal hears nothing but the utterances of his father's joy. "It is meet

that we should make merry and be glad, for this my son was dead, and is alive again, was lost, but is found."

How it was that he did not first sacrifice on an altar the eldest son, who had never done anything wrong is for orthodox Christians to explain. I only say that, as far as I understand it, this parable is the Gospel—the only view of God, worthy of the name of God's spell or God's message. For it is the word of love and forgiveness which He speaks through every human heart, that God is indeed a Father not only to the good, but also to the evil. Can we wonder, then, that if this was the tone of Jesus in speaking of God, that He should have taught all men to pray as their first prayer, "Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name." If there be a God at all to whom we owe all the finer feelings of our nature, our instinctive aspiration after goodness, and our purest and most unselfish affection, then the only name we can give to that God is the name of Father—"*Father in Heaven*"—to express our confession of the naked poverty of our highest conceptions, and of our feeble language to express the whole truth. But still "Father," because it is the highest title—the name which is above every name—the expression at once of all that is just, impartial, constant, unwearied, self-sacrificing, tender and loving.

I cannot pray this simple prayer, I cannot utter this brief but comprehensive *Te Deum*, without all my antagonism being excited and my indignation

roused against the Christian doctrines beneath which it has been so long buried. The words, it is true, are still babbled in Christian churches, but they are denied, trampled on, and befouled by the various schemes of Redemption and doctrines of atonement which have invaded the sanctuary. The more angry that men are because I will not call Jesus "Lord, Lord"—because I will persist in shewing that he was only a man like ourselves—the more it delights me to shew that these discourses and parables of his, which no tampering or artifice can ever put out of sight, prove him to have been no Christian at all, but a Theist—a Jewish Theist—and that he learned his pure Monotheism from his mother's lips, and from the Hebrew Scriptures; and that, because he believed in earnest what others around him only said they believed, and acted out kindness instead of only talking about it, he grew up to know that God was in very truth the common father of all mankind, and would act a father's part towards every child of man.

I would conclude this morning by calling your attention to a very powerful attack made upon the Christian Evidence Society by Thomas Scott, Esq., of Ramsgate, not only published, but written by him. The pamphlet is entitled "*The tactics and defeat of the Christian Evidence Society;*" and I earnestly recommend my hearers to read it themselves, and to get as many as possible of their orthodox friends to read it too.

I will close with a short extract from the work itself (pages 8 and 9) :—

("The so-called 'Infidel') may turn round on the self-styled Christian advocate and say, 'I am a truer Christian than you are. I have really a Gospel to preach to you and to all men, the very Gospel which Christ preached. I believe that all things are the work of an Eternal Mind or Spirit, to which my mind or spirit stands in a definite relation. I believe that this Eternal Mind or Spirit is absolutely just, true, and loving; and I cling to all the consequences which are involved in this conviction. I believe that as His Will is to bring us to our highest good—in other words, to bring our mind into perfect conformity with His Divine Mind—so also He has the power to do this; that this Power and Will are bringing about the perfect vindication of His justice, and that His justice and mercy are synonymous terms. I hold that, whatever be the origin or descent of man, God has never been absent from any of His creatures; that from the first dawnings of his sense He has been educating and training men, by a long process indeed and a painful one, through the indefinite series of ages, until they have reached their present state, and that He will continue this work in the long series of ages yet to come. I believe that because we live in Him now, we shall continue so to live after we have undergone the change which we call death; that the denial of this cuts at the root of all morality and law, because it cuts at the root of all love; for what is the meaning of growth in the knowledge of God, what is the meaning of patience, forbearance, truth-

fulness, unselfishness, if the wheels of a steam-engine may end all my concern with them at any moment, or if I may escape from my duty by throwing myself into the sea? I need not go further. I have said enough to show you that I am not an infidel, and, as I think, to show you that my faith is vastly higher, and is far more nearly and really the faith of Christ than is yours.'"

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, ON SUNDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 1871.

"*Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*"

MATTHEW vii. 12.

WE may fairly concede that this was the key-note of the moral teaching of Jesus. It was the summing-up of those fragmentary precepts which formed the bulk of his Sermon on the Mount, and it is no disparagement to him or to his wisdom to say that there was nothing new in this principle of conduct. It had been proclaimed before and in other lands, and he himself admits that he finds this comprehensive law of duty in the Hebrew Scriptures—that this in fact is the sum and substance of all that had been already given to men as the Divine Commands. "This is the law and the prophets."

We may find reason to object to some of his precepts in detail, we may even produce instances from the narratives of his own conduct, in which he failed to fulfil this golden rule, but we cannot withhold our frank admission that, on the whole, Jesus was eminently a preacher of righteousness, one who

studied in his own person the amiabilities and courtesies of life, who tried to act the part of a friend and helper to all who needed his friendship and help, and who taught men to think far more about their duties in common life than about any religious profession or any particular creed. As illustrations of this, I would mention the parables of the Good Samaritan, and the Sheep and the Goats, and I could quote a great many verses from the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see—not your faith, or orthodoxy—but *your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father in Heaven, &c." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven, is perfect." "Judge not, that ye be not judged." "By their fruits shall ye know them." "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven;" and there is my text from the same source, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do unto them: for this is the law and the prophets."

I will not read the parable of the Good Samaritan which every one must remember with approval, but I will call great attention to the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, as being one of our best weapons against

the Christian faith as set forth in the Athanasian creed. If Jesus spoke this parable, he most certainly taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment, describing the judgment day and the separation into two classes of those who were to be welcomed into eternal life, and those who were to be condemned to eternal woe. Here instead of Jesus making *Creed* the test of distinction—instead of his making any discipleship or personal regard for himself the condition of salvation, he passes all these Christian doctrines by, to expatiate on the lofty and eternal value of the merit of kindly offices between man and man. I will not spoil it by paraphrase, but read it to you *verbatim.* (The reader is here referred to Matth. xxv. 31—46.) This passage I venture to affirm is among the very strongest and most explicit, as well as among the least questioned of all the sayings of Jesus. Here you have him declaring his own plain belief in the devil and his angels, in everlasting fire, in everlasting punishment, and in all the horrors of a day of judgment, with himself as Lord and Judge presiding over the dread scene; and yet, notwithstanding all this tremendous support given to the darkest features of Christianity, Jesus says not a word about faith in himself, or in atonement, or in sacraments, or in any one of the things considered essential in Christendom—nay, he discourages the idea of any loyalty to himself being a title to salvation, but emphatically makes the destiny of each one depend on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of some kindly service between man and man.

In the Sermon on the Mount there is a parallel passage, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity." With such texts before us, we cannot deny that the moral sayings of Jesus are in fatal antagonism with the central dogma of Christianity: "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

It would be unfair to the memory of Jesus to overlook what one may call the distinctive feature in his own life and teaching as regards our duty to the undeserving. His was especially a Gospel of forgiveness, not only of the forgiveness of God, but of the forgiveness of each other. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive you," is the strain of many and many a warning. In his parable of the Two Debtors, he enforces this not only by making us sympathise with the unforgiven debtor, but also by shewing the terrible punishment which overtook the servant who would not have compassion upon his fellow, as his master had had compassion on him. Seventy times seven are not too many times a day in which we are to forgive those who trespass against us. Can it be true that this was the teaching of Jesus, when we find hardly one of those who call him Lord, Lord, even trying to carry out this principle in their dealings with disagreeable people, wayward and

careless servants, and persons who have given them offence? We do find it practised occasionally, but the rule is, for the most part, "Never forgive any wrong you can punish." "It is a mistake," people say, "to be too lenient." "Those servants always take advantage of kindness, and will do worse if you don't scold or punish them." Such language translated into action one hears and sees in nearly every Christian family—such are the disciples of Jesus and believers in the New Testament.

Another feature of this same trait of character in Jesus was his friendliness with outcasts and sinners. Having spoken so recently on this point, I need not here repeat what I then said, but it must not be left out of the list of the teachings of Jesus, because it was emphatically his teaching by example.

Nor can we overlook the habits which called down upon him the reproach of the Pharisees, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," and his conduct on the sabbath. All this worldliness, if I may so term it, this practical rebuke of austerity and asceticism, has left its mark upon the world. Mendicant friar though he was, he still mixed freely among men, eating and drinking what came in his way, and not shunning the pleasures and entertainments to which he was invited. It may be fairly reckoned among his moral teachings, that we should use this world without abusing it, and prove our brotherhood with all men by sharing not merely their sorrows, but their amusements. I am not by any means in favour of

levelling all class distinctions, even if such an insane project could be carried out; but I think that we have carried the principle of caste to its extreme limits, when we are able to go among lowly people in their sorrow and weep with all that weep, and yet hold rigorously aloof from them in their mirth, refusing to rejoice with them in their rejoicings, and thus proving that our sympathy is not complete.

We cannot sympathise fully with others, unless we are able to share in their amusements and mirth as well as in their distress. So striking a feature in the practical teaching of Jesus, as this universal sympathy, is well worthy of notice.

He *said* much about humility, *e.g.*, "He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." And there is that famous episode in which he teaches humility by the presence of a little child, but I must confess I have hitherto quite failed to discover what Jesus meant by humility, or wherein his own humility consisted. Little children for the most part are neither humble nor proud, they are simple and frank and confiding—now and then not a little conceited, but when they are *humble* I do not know.

If, by humility, Jesus meant mere docility, teachableness, receptiveness, this is certainly the proper attitude for a child, who is surrounded by persons who are its natural guardians and teachers, and who, however ignorant, must know something more than the child itself. But inasmuch as this frame of mind is proper in the child, it is more or less improper in

a man, who ought to put away childish things, and among other things of this kind, *a childish credulity* which takes everything upon trust. Much is made of the humility of service—of ministering to others—as if such service could be humiliating. Why, those who have tried it know what an honour it is to minister to the wants of others, and how hard it is to keep themselves from being proud of it. I would reverse those words of Jesus, "He that is chiefest among you, let him be your servant," by saying "He that is the truest servant among you, let him be reckoned as your chief." *Measure dignity by merit, and merit by service.* I find no humility here. Shall we find it in the master washing the disciples' feet? I trow not. Jesus is not the only one who has done this: many a mistress has washed the feet of her maid, and nursed her wounds with tender care, either from love or gratitude to a faithful servant, or from a proper sense of her duty to one who needed such service; and I do not suppose any such mistress ever had a thought that she was humbling herself by this proper and beautiful humanity. Think what the doctors and surgeons and hospital nurses have to go through in their service of the sick and wounded—often unpaid for—and then compare this with the ceremony of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. There is no humility here.

Some day I will preach a sermon on humility, but we cannot stop to define it now. I only repeat that I find much talk and no practice of humility in these narratives of Jesus. His expectation of his re-ap-

pearing in the clouds of heaven, and sitting on the throne of judgment to judge all the nations of the earth, is such a stain upon the simplicity of his character, that we cannot truthfully credit him with a genuine humility.

Common honesty leads me to touch upon another feature in his character closely allied to the foregoing, and bearing intimately on the subject of his moral teaching.

On several occasions Jesus is represented as engrossing a large amount of personal regard and attachment; nay, more, as claiming it and asking for it, promising rewards if it were granted, hurling threats if it were refused. "If any man confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man confess before the angels of God; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father in Heaven."

In so many ways is this claim represented to have been made, that we can hardly believe that there was no foundation in *fact* for the reports. Your attention, however, is directed to it as one of the most striking blemishes on the character of Jesus. It was not enough that men should follow him about and listen to his words, they must sacrifice for him every other calling and duty in life. If they are fishermen, they must leave fish, nets, and ships all on shore, and follow him. If they are sitting at the receipt of custom, they must give it all up and follow him. If they would fain come, but must first pay some tribute of affection to their anxious relatives—

no, it will not do. He says, "If any man come after me and *hate* not (this is the word used and given by the inspired Luke), and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

A man must not stay even to bury his own father, but must come at once, regardless of all filial duty and instinct, or not come at all. This putting a man's love of his own life above his love for his father and mother, and wife and children, explains a good deal of this infatuated demand for an undivided attachment. Jesus was not only an unmarried man, but if there is a grain of truth in the narratives, he was absolutely deficient in natural affection. He seemed to know nothing of the sacred force and tenderness of family ties. He was eaten up by a sort of passion for religious excitement; and his enthusiasm for this new kingdom over which he was to reign, and in the rule of which he was to be assisted by his own immediate followers, carried him into extremes of revolt against natural ties, which debar him, in my opinion, from being trusted implicitly as a teacher of morals.

It is of no avail to question the accuracy of his reported sayings, unless we cast aside likewise many of his reported actions. He is represented more than once as acting, in an unkind, thoughtless, and even cruel manner towards his own father and mother and brethren. He could, at the age of twelve years, not only get away unknown to his parents, to their

agony, but when told of their sorrow at losing him, he made no sort of apology, never uttered a word of regret, but only began to vindicate himself on the ground of a higher obligation; as though God in heaven ever did or ever would desire a child to keep its parents in mental torture for three days! He is often cold and distant to his yearning mother, and when she and his brethren pass near the door of the room where he is preaching, and desire to speak with him, he not only takes no notice of their request, but openly depreciates his attachment to them, saying, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he looked round about on them that stood by him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren, for whosoever doeth the will of God the same is my mother and sister and brother." In other words, "I love quite as well as, and even more than, my own mother and family, those who follow me about to hear what I have to say."

The advocates of Christianity point to these passages as instances of Jesus's own declaration of his own superiority to human ties, *i.e.*, he must have been God to have been so indifferent to his mother and relations. Now, if we must draw this inference, I for one decline to share any kingdom of heaven in which that will be the law. I decline to take Jesus —God or no God—for my guide, my Lord, or my master. I will deliberately take the whole risk, if there be any, of refusing to be saved by him, or to believe in his precepts, or to follow his example, if this indifference to, this trampling upon, family ties,

be part of the conditions of discipleship. I will say to those advocates as I said in my lecture on the Bible, "If this Jesus be your God, then, in the name of all that is holiest and purest in human feeling, yours is a God whom I will not follow nor believe in; whose every word on this subject I will disobey, and whose every guidance I will distrust."

We have heard to repletion the claim that women owe everything to Jesus; that it was due to him alone that woman has been elevated and raised. I have searched in vain for grounds of this claim in the New Testament narratives. If Jesus counselled aught about women, it was only to leave them alone, not to marry if we could help it; and St. Paul follows in the same strain, exalting celibacy and depreciating marriage. The useful domesticated Martha, with her thoughtful hospitality, is rebuked for being cumbered with much serving, while the idle Mary, who sits with her hands before her to hear him talk, is bepraised to the skies. This and such tales do not tend to the elevation of women, or to the exaltation of their household duties.

We owe the elevation of women to the Western and Northern races, as contrasted with the Eastern ones; to the love of home and family; to the sacredness in which domestic harmony is held by Teuton and Scandinavian, and whose mission it was to oppose and supplant polygamy by the higher institution of one husband to one wife, the advantages of which have been felt and adopted by all Eastern races who have dwelt among us, and who are now

quite as remarkable for domestic purity as those people who have been monogamists from the beginning. Woman's elevation, not one whit more than the abolition of slavery, owes anything whatever to Christianity. It is the *family principle* which has done it all, and which has yet a glorious career of reformation before it. The family principle, which Jesus undervalued and knew nothing of by experience, is going now to revolutionise not only many of our customs and habits, but is destined to sweep away all forms of tyranny and wrong; is teaching us all that is highest in our conception of God, all that is purest in our duty to man; and is undermining more and more, day by day, the cumbrous, obstructive, and repulsive mass of the Christian Faith; it is the very deadliest foe to priestcraft and superstition, while it is the heart and life of all true religion and morality.

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL,
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"*Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able.*"

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

Two branches of our enquiry remain now to be examined—viz., what did Jesus teach concerning the future life? and what did he teach about the Devil? I will endeavour to reply to both of these questions this morning.

I shall not be sorry to close for the present a discussion on which I could not enter without reluctance, and which I could not pursue without pain. If people think there is any amusement or gratification to be derived from making an attack on the most cherished belief of one's countrymen, it is because they have never been called upon to discharge a duty so repugnant. There are numbers of really excellent, kind-hearted, and intelligent persons—far removed indeed from the extravagant superstitions of orthodoxy—who yet retain opinions or sentiments about Jesus which are utterly unsupported by the

facts of his history. The name "Christ" has been associated in their minds, from earliest childhood, with all that is purest and most beautiful in human nature; it has been the synonym for moral perfection and the finest spiritual insight. The pity is not that people should have had such an ideal to dwell upon and admire, but that it should have been associated with an historical personage like Jesus, whose biographies represent him as being far from perfect either in wisdom or in humanity. Jesus may or may not have been morally perfect, no one can possibly decide such a question now with anything like certainty; but what tells most heavily against the theory of his perfection is the fact that the very records of his life, character, and sayings prove that he was imperfect. These, when examined, dispel the illusion, and leave us convinced that they afford no ground for it whatever. It has been asked, Why disturb this graceful, this harmless belief in an ideal Christ? My answer is, because it is *not* harmless, because its attractiveness is only a garment hiding a falsehood, because it does really decoy our hearts' love and adoration from a still higher and more legitimate object of our contemplation. It comes between us and God; it leads us to think more of the creature than of the Creator; and, in any case, if it be untenable, if Jesus were not really or nearly perfect man, it must do harm to believe a falsehood. He either was this perfect man or he was not. If he was, let us have the grounds for believing it made so clear that there can be no question of it; let the

true outlines of that perfection be also constantly set before us, for our imitation. But if he was not perfect, if he really had human infirmity, was guilty of human faults, or failed anywhere in human duty, let us, in the name of God and truth, know that also; let us, at all cost of sentiment and feeling, get at the truth of things if we can, and bravely cast from us the idol which we have ignorantly cherished, trusting God to compensate our hearts for their bitterest loss, and being very sure that whatever sacrifice we make for the truth's sake we are making for Him, and in the very act of self-surrender we are enriching and elevating our souls.

To turn now to our more immediate subject, I find that in the first three Gospels there is a great deal of confusion of thought on the subject of the Future Life. We have first the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, many of the features of which are grossly materialistic, and were evidently intended as literal representations of an earthly condition. In some of the parables, *e.g.* that of the Leaven and the three measures of meal, and the Grain of mustard-seed, it would seem that the kingdom was to be begun then and there in the lifetime of Jesus and his followers, and to be gradually spread over all the world. But in other and plainer teachings of Jesus, it was not to be inaugurated till after his death and his return in glory. Even then, the twelve apostles (including Judas and excluding Paul and Matthias, I suppose) were to sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then, again, we find quite another view of the kingdom. It was to be a purely spiritual one; they who entered into it were "neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, but were to be as the angels of God." The saints were to rise from the earth, *i.e.* from some spot in Syria, and to meet the Lord in the air, while the dead were to come forth out of their graves, with their bodies, and assemble for the final judgment.

The whole subject is such a hopeless tangle, that we can only infer from the recorded sayings of Jesus two leading ideas, viz., that he taught that there was a life beyond the grave, and that there would be a bodily resurrection. Science has, of course, disposed of the latter theory as impossible and even absurd. No scientific light has yet been thrown on the future life, in which, nevertheless, we entirely believe, and which we hope for on grounds never hinted at by Jesus. We gather further, from two passages, that Jesus believed in an existence apart from the body. The last words to the thief on the cross, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus show that Jesus recognised the continued existence of a soul or spirit between the death and the supposed resurrection of the body.

All this is profoundly uninteresting and utterly valueless. I only allude to it because I could not well ignore it under this division. All the interest of this subject turns upon what Jesus taught about the ultimate destiny of mankind. And this, I fear, we

shall find very unsatisfactory, and very strongly supporting the darkest features of the orthodox belief. My text sums up the opinion of Jesus in the most emphatic way. One came and said to him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" No new question, alas! on the lips of men weighed down by the memory of the past, the burden of the present, and the omens of the future. Some poor tender soul who had been living, perhaps, among very degraded people, or who had guilty sons and daughters, and for whom the thought of eternal woe sat like a nightmare upon his spirit—one who had, perhaps, been scared by a flash from the bottomless pit, and who trembled at the peril of standing on its brink, hoping against hope that he might be rescued among the crowd that were no better, no worse, than himself—"Lord, are there few that be saved?"—Can it be true that only a few out of these miserable dupes who have been brought into the world of sin and temptation without being asked whether they would accept the awful risk or not,—can it be true that only a few of all these will escape the impending doom? And Jesus answered in words still more dismal and perplexing, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." A very curious reason, indeed for striving at all. I do not speak for others, but for myself I should call this the most discouraging answer that could possibly be given. The natural rejoinder would rise to my lips, "What is the use of striving, then, if some, nay, if many,

who seek to enter in, will not be able? What an inexpressibly infamous thing it seems, that those who want to be saved shall not be saved! I would rather take my chance with the crowd than strive on such conditions."

These words of Jesus are followed by one of those allegories in which he frequently indulged, in order to describe the utter hopelessness of the condition of the condemned. In the same strain he describes Abraham speaking to the rich man in hell, "Besides all this, there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would pass from us to you cannot, neither can they pass to us who would come from thence." Not a gleam of hope is left after the sentence is pronounced. Three times in the 25th chapter of Matthew is this awful picture of final condemnation put before us, and in many other places as well. We cannot, on this point, censure orthodox people for not following the teachings of the master. They are fully justified by the sayings of Jesus, over and over again, for teaching that only few will be saved, and that for the large majority of men and women there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

But mark what is taking place around us at this moment. Even the orthodox have begun to shudder at this cardinal doctrine of their belief, and so some among them have risen up to try to prove that the Bible does not teach everlasting punishment, that the words of Jesus do not convey that idea, although he says, in answer to the question "Are there few

that will be saved?" "Many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able;" although he says that he will say on the judgment seat, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

What will not people do and say to save their idols? When it was fairly established that the earth was moving round the sun, then the priests discovered all at once that the Bible never said that it did not. When it was discovered that the world was many, many long cycles in assuming its present aspect, the priests suddenly discovered that the Bible did not say the world was made in six days. And now that the doctrine of everlasting punishment for the majority of our race is utterly disbelieved, the priests are discovering that the Bible never sanctioned any such awful doctrine.

My friends, let me urge it upon you as a duty: do not spare these shifting, shuffling advocates of Christianity when you can effectually expose them. It is an absolute duty binding upon us as men and brethren, to shew up these wretched attempts to sustain and uphold a tottering idol. No doubt the next thing we shall hear of is, that Jesus did not believe in the existence of a Devil, or his angels, as this too is a belief that is beginning to die.

And this brings us to our second question.

It is generally known and acknowledged that the source from whence the Jews derived their belief in the Devil was Persia; and that all allusions to the Devil in their historical books were either interpo-

lations by some post-Babylonish editor, or that they prove the late composition of the books in which they occur. The Book of Job, *e.g.*, is a poem which opens with a colloquy between Ormuzd and Ahriman, or Jehovah and Satan, in which they are represented as speaking to each other almost on equal terms. In the First Book of Chronicles an act is ascribed to Satan which in the Second Book of Samuel had been ascribed to Jehovah.

This dualism or the personification of the Powers of Good and Evil, as rival Deities, was quite a foreign element in the Jewish theology and was, as I said, the result of their contact with the Babylonians. After the captivity it spread very much, and demonology was at its triumph in the days of Jesus of Nazareth. The story of his temptation in the wilderness was either a pure fabrication, or reported from his own lips, because no one but himself was present at the scene. If the story came originally from him, we want no further evidence that he shared in the delusion of the age about the personalty of Satan. But you can hardly find a case of his curing diseases, excepting leprosy, in which the disease is not attributed to some devil, not merely to the agency of a Satan, but to the actual possession of men and women by evil spirits. These occasions too often gave rise to angry discussions between Jesus and the Pharisees, in which it is invariably represented that Jesus shared the common belief of his time. He speaks of a woman who had a natural disease as having been

"bound eighteen years" by Satan. He constantly rebukes the evil spirits, and casts them out of their unhappy victims, and when they are about to confess that he is the Messiah, he suffers not the devils to speak, but commands them to hold their peace. On one occasion he pretends to send a whole legion of devils into a herd of swine, the property of a Gentile tribe on the shores of Gennesaret, upon which the inhabitants very naturally besought him to depart out of their coasts. He speaks of Satan's Kingdom being divided against itself. He recognises Beelzebub as the prince of the devils, and distinguishes one sort of devil from another by saying, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

Finally there is the collection of passages already quoted about the "Everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels," which express most painfully his own conviction that men were exposed to the constant evil influence of unseen spirits, who tempted them to sin, and afflicted them with bodily pain, and who were destined in consequence to everlasting torment as soon as the Kingdom of Christ should be established. Of course one is not surprised to find his own followers, Peter, James, and John in their Epistles, taking up the same terrible strain, "Your adversary, the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

It may be asked why this belief in a devil should be made the subject of censure in treating of the teachings of Jesus. I would answer, because the belief in a devil or devils implies not only the

limitation of God's power and rule in the world, but that He has a formidable rival in the person of Satan, who has disturbed all the Divine plans, and with whom the Almighty is in perpetual warfare, but who will at length so triumph over God and God's goodness, as to wrest from Him 99 out of every 100 of the family of man, and to drag them down with him into everlasting sin and woe.

This belief in a devil makes God's Empire ghastly, chaotic, and His Sovereignty nearly contemptible. It establishes a conviction of the ultimate triumph of evil over good, quite as dishonouring to God as any open blasphemy. It reduces men and women to the miserable condition of irresponsible beings, who are little better than the pawns and puppets in a drama of inconceivable horror and duration, in which we may have just one chance in 100 of escaping endless perdition.

But there are higher grounds still for rejecting this belief, and it would be well, if not only the orthodox, but also many heretics and atheists would consider and examine them. The belief in a devil arose out of a false estimate of the sufferings and ills of this life. When the Atheist says he denies God because a good God would not allow any suffering to take place in His Empire, he is taking the same ground precisely as those who attribute all our suffering to the devil. It is extremely short-sighted in us to pronounce such a verdict upon human and other suffering, among other reasons because we have not seen and cannot see how all things will end; and this folly is further

aggravated when we have already unmistakable proofs that *some* sufferings are productive of so much good as to make the appointment of them perfectly justifiable, and that some of the highest virtues known to man could never have had birth without suffering and even sin. I conceive then that I am fully justified in saying that the teaching of Jesus was signally defective and erroneous on this point; that he misconceived entirely the nature and purport of human sufferings, and that, in attributing these to the devil, he to that extent undermined the very faith in a loving and omnipotent Father, which at other times he so eloquently taught. Moreover, when he went still further and taught not only that few were to be saved, but also that many would seek to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and yet would not be able, he contradicted deeply and irremediably the highest teachings of his own Sermon on the Mount, and drowned the little faith which his simple words had inspired in a flood of horrible and hopeless despair.

It was, I believe, chiefly because he was no parent himself and had not warm affections as a son that he absolutely failed to enter into all the comfort and tenderness and universal security which is pledged to us in that blessed name "Our Father in Heaven." Had he known more of fatherhood on earth, he would never have found room in his Father's boundless realms either for the devil and his angels, or for the unspeakable horrors of an everlasting fire into which not only fiends, but all their wretched

victims among mankind would be mercilessly hurled.

But his gracious words, "Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name," still live; and many and many a generation will pass away before all the sweetness, and hope, and bliss which they convey have died out of them.

We too will take up his Gospel of a Father's love to an infantile and struggling world, but will enrich it with our own deeper insight and wider experience, thanking God more and more for all the discipline and sorrow of life through which we learn our highest lessons of hope, and trust, and love.

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